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Lexington, Concord,
and the beginning of the
American Revolution

The First Stroke



“The first stroke
will decide a great deal.”

General Thomas Gage,
Royal Governor of Massachusetts

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American Revolution

The First Stroke


by Thomas Fleming

Illustrated by Louis S. Glanzman

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 1978

Thomas Fleming, novelist and historian, has specialized in the era of the American Revolution for more than 20 years. He has written widely praised books on the battles of Bunker Hill, Springfield, and Yorktown, as well as biographies of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. His most recent non-fiction work on the Revolution is *1776: Year of Illusions*.

1	Gunfire at Dawn
9	A Struggle to Unite
25	Brinkmanship in Massachusetts
38	March to Lexington
48	The Capture of Concord
58	Challenge at the Bridge
67	The Road to Inevitable Destruction
76	“A New and More Terrific Scene”
81	The Battle of Menotomy
91	An Image of Free Men



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On April 19, 1775, in the grey interval between dawn and sunrise, some 38 Americans formed two uneven lines on the wet, dandelion-speckled grass of the triangular 2-acre common in the center of Lexington, Massachusetts. They were summoned by the rolling beat of 16-year-old William Diamond's brightly painted drum. The order to sound this call to arms had been given by Lexington's big, burly militia captain, John Parker, 45-year-old veteran of the French and Indian War. The men had been waiting all night for the summons, most of them in the Buckman Tavern, a white clapboard building just east of the green. Others hurried from 12 houses that faced three sides of the green. As more men joined the ranks, Captain Parker's numbers grew to approximately 70, still considerably short of the 130 names on his muster list.

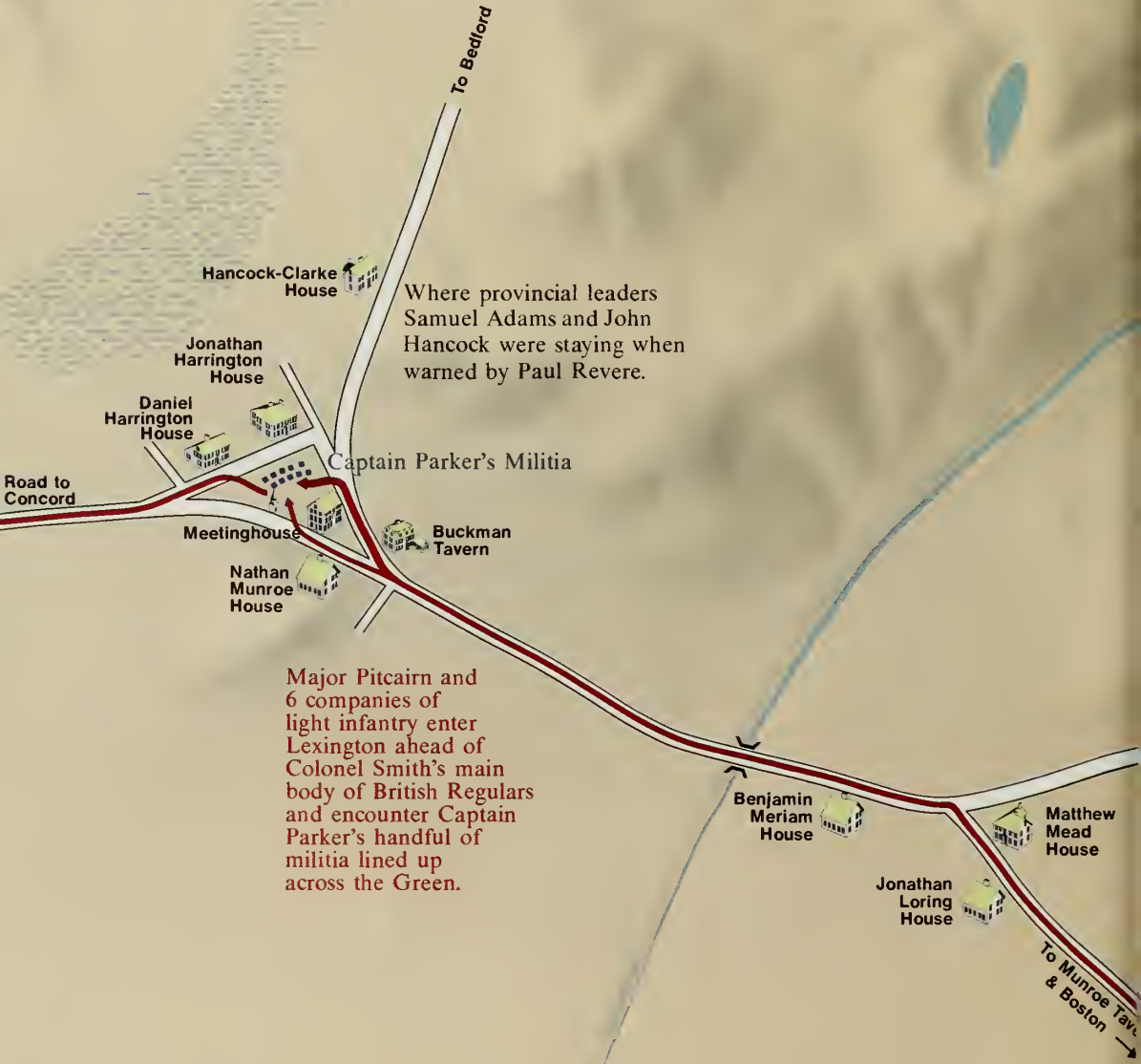
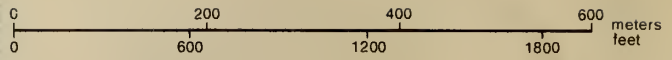
William Diamond's drum had rolled and Parker's men had formed up in response to a shouted warning from a rider Captain Parker had sent out to scout the Boston road. A British column, the excited man said, was only 15 minutes away and marching fast.

Parker and his men were on the north end of the common, close to where one branch of the Boston road led to Bedford. Another branch, leading to Concord, bent left past the opposite side of the common. Their view of the fork, from which the road ran to Boston 11 miles away, was blocked by the town's bulky 2½-story meeting house, where they gathered on Sundays to hear their minister, the Rev. Jonas Clarke, tell them that the British were plotting to deprive Americans of their liberty and that it was every man's sacred duty to resist them.









Major Pitcairn and 6 companies of light infantry enter Lexington ahead of Colonel Smith's main body of British Regulars and encounter Captain Parker's handful of militia lined up across the Green.

LEXINGTON

April 19, 1775

Although they had guns in their hands, these men of Lexington were not regular soldiers. They wore their everyday clothes—loose brown or grey homespun cloth coats and leather or cloth knee breeches. They elected their officers once a year and wrote their own rules and regulations, which included a fine of 3 shillings for “any person of the Company that shall Interrupt the Capt[ain] or Commanding Officer while under Arms by talking laughing or any Indecent Behavior.” About a quarter of the men were related to Captain Parker by blood or marriage. Most of the men came from families that had been living in Lexington for several generations, and almost all shared some degree of kinship. The company clerk, Daniel Harrington, whose house stood only a few steps from the common, was a son-in-law of 63-year-old Robert Munroe, one of the company’s ensigns (the 18th-century equivalent of a second lieutenant). Another Harrington—Jonathan—lived in the house next door, with his wife and small son. Thirty-eight-year-old William Tidd, the company’s lieutenant, was also married to one of Ensign Munroe’s daughters. The men included grandfathers like Jonas Parker, the captain’s cousin, and Moses Harrington, who were there with their married sons. Six younger men such as John Muzzy were also there with sons in their teens or early twenties.

Incongruous among the two rows of white faces was the glistening black skin of the slave, Prince Estabrook. He had become a member of the company by majority vote, in accordance with the regulation that “any Person Desiring to be Admitted . . . shall have a vote of the Company for the same. . . .”

If Captain Parker and his men had any plan, it was to keep as far away as possible from the Concord road. They knew that Concord was the British column’s destination, and earlier in the evening, when the first alarm was brought to Lexington by riders from Boston, they had been told the British numbered between 1,200 and 1,500 men. Captain Parker and his men had conferred and decided “not to . . . meddle or make with [the] Regular troops.”

The Lexington men heard hundreds of feet striking the ground with military precision. Parker and his company waited, their eyes on the Concord road. At any moment, they thought they would see it full of redcoated infantry. But around that side of the meeting house

came only a single British officer on horseback, gesturing with a sword, followed by at least three other mounted officers. Around the Bedford Road side of the meeting house came six companies of red-coated British light infantry, three abreast, 12 men to a file. Beside them were at least six civilians they had captured on the road.

There was a split second pause in the British pace. Then the light infantry raced toward the Americans, shouting furiously, the two lead companies forming a line of battle twelve abreast and three deep. The officer waving the sword was Major John Pitcairn of the Royal Marines. He was in command of these light infantrymen, traditionally the most agile and active soldiers in their regiments. "Lay down your arms," he shouted to Parker's men. From the other officers on horseback came contradictory commands. "Disperse, ye rebels!" one roared. "Surrender," cried another. "Damn them we will have them," bellowed a third.

The appalled Captain Parker turned to his men and told them to disperse without firing. Most of them began to scatter, some at a slow, grudging pace, others more quickly. Old Jonas Parker and a few others hesitated. Grandfather Parker had vowed never to retreat if the British attacked them.

"Surround them," shouted Pitcairn to the charging light infantrymen. But they were not listening to him nor to anyone else. No one knows how the shooting began or who fired the first shot. Pitcairn later said he thought he saw a gun held by a man behind a stone wall on the edge of the green "flash in the pan." (The powder in the musket's firing pan ignited but not the cartridge in the barrel, so the gun failed to go off.) American witnesses—there were about 40 men, women, and children standing around the green or watching from the windows and doorways of the adjacent houses—say one of the British officers on horseback fired a pistol. If either occurred, it only confirmed the intentions of the light infantrymen from the moment they saw Parker's men facing them on the common.

No one knows for certain if the redcoated soldiers in the two lead companies followed the drill-book routine which they had practiced hundreds of times in Boston during the preceding months. If they did, the men in the two lead companies stopped a few dozen yards from

Parker's men and the second rank stepped a half pace to the right. The third rank stepped another half pace to the right. This gave every man in the two companies a chance to fire without hitting the soldier in front of him. Eyewitness comments about a "ragged fire" suggests that excitement may have prevented them from performing this maneuver with precision. But within a few seconds the soldiers of the two lead companies began blasting away at the Lexington men.

A huge billow of white gunsmoke swirled in the murky dawn air as murderous bullets tore into Captain Parker's volunteers. Ensign Robert Munroe was dead when he hit the ground. A cousin, John Munroe, gasped as a bullet smashed his arm. Young Isaac Muzzy died at his father's feet. Jonathan Harrington, hit in the chest, crawled painfully to the doorstep of his house and died there, before the eyes of his horrified wife and son.

A wild melee erupted as Parker's men began firing back. A number of men who had lingered in the Buckman Tavern opened fire from the first- and second-floor windows. More guns boomed from the windows of other houses around the common. The rear companies of light infantry stormed into the fight, some returning the shots from the tavern and houses, others charging Parker's men with lowered bayonets.

Old Jonas Parker, hit in the first volley, fired his musket from a sitting position and struggled to get a fresh cartridge and flint from his hat, which he had placed on the ground between his feet. A light infantryman stopped him with a bayonet thrust. Asahel Porter of Woburn, one of the captives, tried to run and was shot dead. He and a Lexington man died north of the common, on the other side of the stone wall. A half dozen more Lexington men were wounded in this vicinity.

One man, pursued by shooting redcoats, raced for shelter in the Marret Munroe house just off the common. He went through the front door and out the back door scarcely breaking his stride. The rest of Parker's men fled into nearby woods and fields at a similar pace.

"Cease firing. Cease firing," shouted Pitcairn. He rode among the milling light infantrymen, striking up their guns with his sword.

But they paid no attention to the marine officer, nor to any other officer. "The men were so wild they could hear no orders," said Lt. John Barker, of the King's Own Light Infantry company.

Into this chaos of swirling gunsmoke, shrieking women and children, roaring light infantrymen, and cursing officers rode corpulent Lt. Col. Francis Smith. He was in command of the 700 men who had left Boston at 9:30 the previous night with orders to destroy American gunpowder, cannon, and supplies at Concord. With the help of a lieutenant, Smith found a drummer and ordered him to beat "to arms" (cease fire). This familiar sound restored some sanity to the berserk light infantrymen. Smith angrily rebuked them for ignoring the commands of their officers and breaking their ranks.

In perhaps 10 minutes, the light infantry were in marching formation on the common. Near them, four Lexington men lay dead or dying. Four more were in the same condition just off the green, and another 10 were staggering or limping for safety with painful wounds. The British had one soldier wounded in the leg. Pitcairn's horse had two bullets in it.

When order had been restored, several officers advised Smith to "give up the idea of prosecuting his march, and to return to Boston, as from what they had seen, and the certainty of the Country being alarmed and assembling, they imagined it would be impractical to advance to Concord." Smith said he saw no reason to deviate from his orders. The light infantrymen were told to give three cheers and fire a volley—a British tradition after a victory has been won.

By this time the rest of the 700-man British force had reached the green. They waited on the Concord road, 10 companies of grenadiers, the biggest soldiers in their regiments, and four additional companies of light infantry, while the brief victory ceremony on the green was performed. Pitcairn's six light infantry companies rejoined the column. In a compact body, their drums beating and fifes skirling, the British marched for Concord, 5 miles away, apparently oblivious to the fact that they had started a war.

Now we know as much as facts can tell us about what happened at Lexington on the morning of April 19th. But knowing the facts is only one step toward understanding them. What did Capt. John Parker think he was doing when he mustered his men on the common? What did he think the British were going to do? Why did the British light infantrymen, soldiers in an army proud of its discipline, so recklessly disobey the orders of their officers and attack the dispersing Americans? Why was it so important for the British to seize the cannon and powder in Concord? What were these British soldiers doing in Massachusetts in the first place?

They came in response to an act of protest. Sixteen months earlier, on the night of December 16, 1773, several hundred men disguised as Mohawk Indians threw 342 chests of tea worth £9,659 6s. 4d. into Boston harbor. They were trying to wreck the British government's attempt to create a monopoly of the tea business in America for the British East India Company—and incidentally persuade Americans to buy an item on which there was a small tax. Great Britain's right to tax Americans was at the heart of the quarrel between the two countries. It was an argument with deep roots. Americans frequently resisted and often evaded British attempts to govern them directly, insisting that each colony had the right to order its own internal affairs through its legislature. There were numerous disputes about where the crown's authority ended and the legislatures' authority began, and vice versa. But on the point of taxation, Americans had always insisted that this right was fundamental and they could not, and would not, surrender it to a Par-

liament in which they had no representatives. The dispute came to a boil in 1765 when Parliament attempted to impose a stamp tax on the Americans. It required them to use official stamps on a wide variety of legal documents, as well as newspapers. Americans protested violently and Parliament repealed the law. But the argument was not abandoned. A substantial majority of the British legislature still believed they had the right to tax the colonies and were determined to force the Americans to agree with them. The tea tax became a symbol of Parliament's stubbornness and the Boston Tea Party became an even more potent symbol of American determination to resist the mother country.

Nine thousand pounds was a large sum of money in 1774—the equivalent of perhaps \$250,000 today. The Boston tea party was serious business, and it produced a shock wave of disbelief and alarm throughout America. Men of "sense and property," such as George Washington, deplored it. Virginians and their Maryland neighbors had, after all, imported record amounts of British tea in 1772, and paid the threepence tax per pound on it without fussing. In the previous 3 years, Americans north and south had paid taxes on—and presumably drunk—580,831 pounds of English tea.

Everyone knew that Parliament had retained the tea duty to maintain its right to tax the colonists—a right that almost every American strenuously refused to concede. They shared the opinion that George Washington graphically expressed to a friend. "The Parliament of Great Britain hath no more right to put their hands into my pocket, without my consent, than I have to put my hands into yours for money." But a threepence tax on tea, paid by merchants in distant ports, did not make Washington or most other Americans, who were farmers like him, feel the parliamentary hand acutely enough to fight about it.

Only in the other ports of America—New York, Philadelphia, Annapolis, Charleston—did anyone cheer Boston's act of destruction. The cheerers were the so-called "popular leaders" who had played prominent and often riotous roles in previous resistance to British taxation. Now they hastened to form Committees of Correspondence in response to Boston's call to unify American resistance. But in

almost every city the committees were dominated by conservatives and moderates. Neither the spark of violence nor even much of a spirit of resistance showed signs of leaping the boundaries of Massachusetts.

New York's popular leaders—Isaac Sears, John Lamb, and Alexander McDougall—fulminated in fine style against a plot to give British “nabobs” the right to exploit America as despotically as they had looted India. But New York's mob, which could more than equal Boston's in violence, was frustrated by a lack of tea ships in the harbor. In Philadelphia, resistance was notably nonviolent. Ship captains were simply told to take their tea back to England, and the sales agents appointed by the East India Company were pressured into resigning. In Charleston, S.C., everyone agreed that no duty should be paid on the East India tea. But they let the royal governor seize it for nonpayment, and land it to be sold at public auction at a later date. This was what the royal governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, had tried to do in Boston—and the local popular leaders later admitted that if he had succeeded, people would have bought the tea, tax or no tax, because it would have undersold any other tea on the market.

In 1774, this native cupidity and an apparent fondness for mob violence gave Bostonians a low reputation south of Connecticut. One New Yorker described the city as the “common sewer of America.” Bostonians had taken the lead in earlier agitation against British attempts to tax Americans without their consent, but the city had forfeited this leadership in 1770, when Boston's merchants had abandoned the policy of boycotting English imports without informing merchants in other colonies.

Bostonians had also become conspicuous for their failure to stop drinking English tea. In 1771, they had imported 265,000 pounds of it, with one of their more prominent merchants, John Hancock, paying duties on 45,000 pounds. In New York, on the other hand, imports of English tea dropped from 320,000 pounds in 1768 to 530 pounds in 1772. Philadelphia's decline was equally steep, going from 175,000 pounds to a paltry 128. Not that Philadelphians and New Yorkers stopped drinking tea. They simply smuggled the differ-

ence—worth about £500,000—from the Dutch, French and Danes via the West Indies.

At the end of February 1774, New York's "Sons of Liberty," as the popular leaders and their followers called themselves, were glum. They admitted to the Boston Committee of Correspondence that they dared not suggest a total boycott of English tea, "least [lest] it might divide us." When two tea ships finally arrived in April, the tea aboard one was dumped into the Hudson River, because the captain had tried to conceal it. The other captain, who confessed his cargo and agreed to return it to England, was escorted to the pilot boat by the Committee of Correspondence while a band played "God Save the King."

In England, the reaction to Boston's tea party was totally different. The news reached London on January 19, 1774, aboard the *Hayley*, owned by that prominent tea shipper, John Hancock. Indignation was instantly the order of the day in the imperial capital. The King's Prime Minister, somnolent, amiable Lord North, and his pious, gentle stepbrother, Lord Dartmouth, the colonial secretary, wanted no trouble with the Americans. But North was Prime Minister largely in name. The real head of the government was 36-year-old George III, who had learned a lot about politics since he came to the throne in 1760 a badly frightened post-adolescent, with absurd ideas about purifying English society.

Though he personally remained narrow, moralistic, and amazingly industrious, George had learned to use his £800,000 a year income from the tax revenues, and the enormous number of frequently meaningless but well paying jobs he also controlled, to buy up (in some cases) or seduce (in most cases) members of Parliament and the leaders of various factions into backing his government. By 1774, no fewer than 170 members of the House of Commons held either government jobs or a government contract. Sixty-eight army officers and 19 naval officers sat in the House and most of them usually voted with the government. The opposition was reduced to a shadow, albeit a most vociferous one.

George III had grown more and more unhappy with his recalcitrant American subjects. His feelings were heartily shared by most of

the North cabinet, especially imperious Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, and pugnacious Lord Suffolk, Secretary of State for Northern Europe. They were part of the “Bloomsbury gang,” a formidable faction which had been calling for a tougher approach to America for years. Now they called for swift punitive action against Boston.

The tea party was no isolated incident, the Bloomsbury gang argued, ignoring the relative peace that had prevailed in America since 1770. It was the latest of a series of acts of defiance to British authority. The whole thing was a plot, they said, with independence the goal and Massachusetts the prime conspirator.

The King and the Cabinet decided that it was time to teach the Bostonians a large, unforgettable lesson. On March 14, 1774, Lord North told Parliament that George III was asking for power, first, “to put an end to the present disturbances in America,” and second, “to secure the just dependence of the colonies on the Crown of Great Britain.” The Americans had already become too independent, in fact, if not in law, and the goal of the government was a reversal of this trend. “At Boston,” Lord North declared later in his speech, “we are considered as two independent states.” It was no longer a question of whether Parliament had the right to tax America, the issue was “whether or not we have any authority.”

North could have said nothing more inflammatory to the swing vote in Parliament, the independent country gentlemen. They never ceased grumbling about the high taxes they paid and acutely resented the fact that Americans paid fewer taxes than any other people in the civilized world. Virtually to a man, the country gentlemen supported North’s Boston Port Bill, which closed the city’s harbor until the ruined tea was paid for and “peace and obedience” were visible in the city streets. One of these country gentlemen, Charles Van of the borough of Brecon in the county of Monmouthshire, declared that he did not think closing the port was sufficient punishment. Americans would never develop any “proper obedience to the laws of this country until you have destroyed that nest of locusts,” Van cried.

No one in the administration contradicted Van’s hysterical rhetoric. They ignored the opposition’s criticism of their policy. One







member warned that the bill would “create that association of the Americans which you have so much wish to annihilate.” Another predicted that “a sort of rebellion will take place.” Edmund Burke sarcastically declared on the day that the bill was voted, “This is the day, then, that you wish to go to war with all Americans, in order to conciliate that country to this.” But the opposition did not even bother to call for a formal vote on the Boston Port Bill, so hopeless was any chance of defeating it. It passed as readily through the House of Lords and was signed by the King on March 31, 1774.

If the North government had stopped with the Port Bill, it might have won its hard-line gamble in America. (We have seen how little support the town of Boston had in other colonies.) There were precedents for punishing—or at least fining—the town of Boston for the destruction of the tea. London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, each of whom had a long tradition of rioting, had been forced to pay damages from the public treasury in the past.

But the government was not satisfied with punishing Boston. It was determined to settle the entire Massachusetts problem by remodeling the colony’s government to guarantee that “just dependence” on the Crown that Lord North had designated as a primary Royal goal. There was no precedent for London unilaterally altering a colony’s royal charter, the document that spelled out the structure of local government and its relationship to King and Parliament. The surgery North recommended for Massachusetts gave the royal governor (who was appointed by the King) virtually unchecked power.

Except for the annual spring elections, town meetings could be held only with the governor’s permission. Judges, sheriffs, and all other law enforcement officials were to be appointed by him alone. No longer could local constables summon juries. The governor’s council, which functioned as a kind of senate, had traditionally been elected by the Massachusetts assembly. Henceforth it would be appointed by the governor.

With this bill came a companion piece called the Administration of Justice Act. It gave the governor power to transport to England any public official indicted for murder while attempting to suppress a riot or enforce the customs laws.

The opposition in Parliament objected to these measures more vigorously than it had fought the Boston Port Bill. Such regulations struck at fundamental rights enjoyed by Americans in all the colonies—rights which Parliament had never before dared to threaten. The North administration and its supporters defended this confrontation in an hysterical tone that inevitably encouraged Charles Van and his clique. The Prime Minister told Parliament that the Americans had “denied all obedience to your laws and authority . . . whatever may be the consequence, we must risk something; if we do not, all is over.” In furious support, Charles Van declared that if the Americans opposed these bills he “would do as was done of old, in the time of ancient Britons, I would burn and set fire to all their woods, and leave their country open to prevent that protection they now have.” If Britain was going to lose America, Van said, “I think it better lost by our own soldiers than wrested from us by our rebellious children.”

These words starkly reveal the psychological dimensions of the conflict and explain to some extent the frantic reaction of the British government. Men like Van and George III took the parent-child image quite literally and reacted to American defiance with the same moralistic petulance that they displayed in their own households. It was an era of authoritarian parents, and few were more authoritarian than the British aristocracy.

The weakness of the opposition was starkly visible in their one organized attempt to halt the government's plunge toward the alienation of America. On April 19, 1774, Rose Fuller, a member who owned huge estates in Jamaica, urged Parliament to repeal the tea act as proof of their peaceful intentions. But the debate that followed this sensible proposal got lost in the intricacies of the previous 10 years of acrimony between Britain and America. The colonial policies of previous ministries were defended and attacked with equal violence and incoherence. The government spokesmen reiterated their brink-of-surrender argument. “If you give up this tax . . . you will be required to give up much more, nay to give up all.” Fuller's bill was defeated, 182 to 49.

Still the government hawks were not satisfied. They amended the Quartering Act, giving British military commanders power to inflict

their troops on Americans in their homes. For a final flourish, they introduced another bill—the Quebec Act. In many ways it was a measure which dealt wisely with the realities of French Canada. It guaranteed religious freedom—in effect acknowledging the dominant role of the Roman Catholic Church—and created a government based on French colonial tradition. There was no elective assembly. But in the context of the confrontation with Massachusetts, this measure looked ominous to largely Protestant America. Why this sudden caressing of their traditional enemies? Was the elimination of an assembly a first step toward the elimination of all colonial assemblies?

For a fillip, the North government chose Gen. Thomas Gage, commander of the British Army in America, to be the new governor of Massachusetts. The incumbent governor, native son Thomas Hutchinson, had asked for a leave of absence, confessing that he had become so unpopular he could no longer govern the province. No one in the North government seemed even slightly aware of the folly of appointing a military man to a civil post in such an explosive situation. Nor the danger of putting more troops into a city where, on March 5, 1770, British soldiers had fired on a mob, killing five men—an incident that Bostonians called a “massacre” and commemorated each year with defiant orations. Constitutionality, restraint, prudence—the basic principles of government—no longer seemed to concern the King and his ministers. Even the mildly pro-American colonial secretary Lord Dartmouth, in a letter to a Philadelphia correspondent, reduced the issue to naked power. For the present there was no point in debating whether Parliament had a right to pass these laws, Dartmouth coolly declared. They had passed them and the question now was “whether these laws are to be submitted to? If the people of America say no, they say in effect that they will no longer be a part of the British empire. . . .”

The Americans heard about the Coercive Acts in the late spring and early summer of 1774. (The Quebec Act was not passed by Parliament until June 16th.) Boston’s popular leaders at first declared themselves overjoyed. One wrote to a friend in New York that “at length the perfect crisis of American politics seems to have arrived.” But Boston’s call for an immediate boycott of British imports received

little support in other colonies. Not even all the merchants of Boston would agree to stop importing British goods through other Massachusetts towns, such as Salem. Many merchants in Boston and in other ports urged the town to pay for the ruined tea. The idea was militantly rejected by the Boston town meeting under the leadership of Samuel Adams. But this did not prevent the Philadelphia Committee of Correspondence, controlled by moderates, to reiterate the advice that Boston pay for the tea and voice great reluctance to endorse a stoppage of trade with England.

In Virginia, that decidedly unradical gentleman, George Washington, demonstrated the impact of the Coercive Acts by calling the cause of Boston "the cause of America." Popular leaders such as Richard Henry Lee and Patrick Henry, the Cicero and Demosthenes of America in the fond opinion of their supporters, urged immediate total defiance. But their rhetoric failed to ignite the largest colony. Almost everyone agreed that Britain had no right to tax America, and Boston must be backed somehow, but there was no agreement whatsoever on halting trade with England. A similar attitude prevailed in South Carolina where combative Christopher Gadsden found his defiant rhetoric cooled by conservative caution.

Outside New England, this was the pattern in virtually every colony. The dominant conservative-moderate coalition and the aggressive popular leaders clashed vigorously on practical action. Almost invariably, the conservatives' solution was to delay doing anything until a continental congress could be assembled to speak for all Americans. The popular leaders reluctantly agreed to this proposition and in most colonies delegations were soon elected with a delicate balance of popular and conservative spokesmen.

Many conservatives frankly hoped that the congress would never meet. But moderate men like George Washington no longer agreed. In late August he told a friend he would not "undertake to say where the line between Great Britain and the colonies should be drawn; but I am clearly of opinion, that one ought to be drawn, and our rights clearly ascertained." Washington added that he wished "that the dispute had been left to posterity to determine." But realist that he was, he saw that "the crisis is arrived when we must assert our rights, or

submit to every imposition, that can be heaped upon us, until custom and use shall make us as tame and abject slaves, as the blacks we rule over with such arbitrary sway. . . .”

Here Washington evoked another image that played a powerful psychological role in American resistance. The vivid reality of slavery, along with the persistent presence of the parent-child image, reinforced other grievances and help to explain why the First Continental Congress which met in Philadelphia on September 5, 1774, became a revolutionary assembly rather than a conservative caucus. But this development was not clear at first to the 56 wary men who gathered in Carpenter’s Hall. John Adams’ diary records his dismay at the pervasive suspicion of New Englanders and especially of Massachusetts men. Quakers tartly reminded Samuel Adams and his cousin John that their brethren had been hanged in Massachusetts. A delegation of Quakers demanded to know why their sect and the Anabaptists were still persecuted in Boston. The Adamses lamely tried to defend themselves until the horse laughs drowned them out. They had an even harder time explaining to the Congress all the taxed tea drunk by Bostonians, and shipped by their fellow delegate, John Hancock.

George Washington’s wish to “draw a line” designating the limits of British power over America was clearly the dominant motive of most delegates. But where and how that line should be drawn quickly split Congress into two opposing camps. The popular leaders backed the idea that Parliament had no inherent power over the colonies and American rights were based not on the British constitution, but on the law of nature. This last phrase awakened images of anarchy in the minds of conservatives who insisted that the British constitution, common law, and colonial charters were a more than adequate foundation for American rights. Delegate after delegate made windy speeches on each side of the question and the men from Massachusetts became very impatient.

Above all else, they wanted Congress to make a decisive statement of support for Boston. The Adamses and their colleagues strove mightily to lessen prejudice and suspicion against their colony. In conversation they breathed moderation and reconciliation. After a talk with Samuel Adams, George Washington indignantly informed a

friend who was serving as a captain in the British army in Boston that, contrary to the captain's claim, no one in New England wanted independence. No such thing was desired by any thinking man in all North America, Washington roundly wrote.

Later, in a less discreet moment, Samuel Adams confessed that the independence of America had been "the first wish of his heart" for the previous 7 years. But he realized that only time—and events—would persuade moderate men like Washington to share this wish.

Before he left Boston, Samuel Adams had arranged for riders to deliver the latest developments from the city to him as rapidly as possible. Among the first news to arrive was a report that war had broken out in Boston. The regulars were murdering the citizens in the street and the fleet was bombarding the city. The effect on Philadelphia was electrifying. "All is confusion . . . every tongue pronounces revenge," wrote a Connecticut delegate. "The bells toll muffled and the people run as if in a case of extremity, they know not where nor why."

As the next day's session of Congress began, Samuel Adams proposed that the Church of England clergyman, the Rev. Jacob Duché, open the proceedings with a prayer. (At home in Boston, where the fear that the British were planning to install bishops in America and persecute dissenters was one of Mr. Adams' most effective political weapons, he was fond of picturing the Church of England as "the whore of Babylon.") In an emotion-charged, brink-of-war atmosphere, Chaplain Duché read the Thirty-fifth Psalm and added an extemporaneous prayer which "filled every bosom present," according to John Adams. General Gage's "horrid butchery" was denounced by moderates and radicals alike. That night Joseph Reed, a Pennsylvania popular party leader, went to Samuel Adams' lodgings and congratulated him upon "a masterly stroke of policy."

Eventually, Congress discovered that the news was erroneous. The British had seized Massachusetts' supply of powder from Cambridge and carried it back into Boston without bloodshed. This did not in the least deter Samuel Adams from the next step in his program to prevent Congress from becoming a constitutional debating society. Into Philadelphia thundered a burly, dust-covered horseman named

Paul Revere, with a set of resolves from the County of Suffolk, which included Boston. Written by Dr. Joseph Warren, Samuel Adams' political colleague, the resolves were nothing less than a declaration of war. They denounced Great Britain as "the parricide which points the dagger to our bosoms," declared that the streets of Boston "were thronged with military executioners," and avowed that the compact between George III and the people of Massachusetts, whose rights were based on natural law, was "totally wrecked, annulled and vacated." The Coercive Acts were denounced and "no obedience" was "due from this province to either or any part" of them. The Resolves called for an immediate stoppage of all trade with England, Ireland, and the West Indies, urged Americans to stop paying all taxes, to ignore the courts and to organize the militia for defense, giving commissions only to those men who have "evidenced themselves the inflexible friends to the rights of the people."

Samuel Adams' timing proved to be superb. Moderates like Washington were bored with the debates and they joined the popular leaders in approving the Suffolk Resolves and ordering them printed in the newspaper. John Adams gleefully informed his diary that he was now convinced that "America will support . . . Massachusetts or perish with her." Taking shrewd advantage of their momentum, the popular leaders swiftly pushed through a resolution requesting merchants to suspend all business with Great Britain until Congress decided whether or not to support Boston by stopping American imports and exports.

When disarray reappeared in Congress over implementing this idea—Virginians, for instance, refused to agree to nonexportation before August 10, 1775, so they could sell their 1774 tobacco crop—the conservatives launched a strong counterattack. Their leader was Joseph Galloway, for many years the most powerful politician in Pennsylvania. On September 28th, Galloway proposed a totally different solution to the crisis—a written constitution which would formally unite Britain and America. It would create a continental legislature, a "Grand Council" to be composed of members elected by the existing colonial legislatures. This body would be presided over by the president general, appointed by the King.

This American parliament would have the power to veto any law passed by England's Parliament affecting the colonies. Conversely, the British Parliament could veto legislation passed by the Grand Council and delegations from the two legislatures would then confer (not unlike the modern American Senate and House of Representatives when they differ on a bill) and work out a compromise. In North America, the Council would operate as a federal government, dealing with matters of "general concern" to the continent. The individual colonies would retain control of their internal affairs.

James Duane of New York enthusiastically seconded Galloway's proposal. To the astonishment of some, Edward Rutledge of South Carolina rose to agree, calling it "almost a perfect plan." In response, the popular leaders were forced to reveal their conviction that no compromise with Great Britain was possible. The closest that any of them came to a serious reply to Galloway's Plan of Union, as it was called, was Patrick Henry's claim that the American legislature would be corrupted by the British. John Jay of New York dared Richard Henry Lee of Virginia to point out one American liberty or right that the Galloway plan did not protect or enhance. Lee did not even try to answer him.

At the end of a day of inconclusive debate, a popular party man shrewdly suggested putting off a vote on Galloway's plan for the time being so that Congress could continue its debate on stopping exports and imports. The conservatives opposed the motion, keenly aware that to table the plan was tantamount to killing it. By a hairline, six colonies to five, with Rhode Island's two-man delegation divided, Congress voted to table the plan. It was the high water mark of those Americans who wanted to stay in the Empire by drawing the sort of line desired by ex-surveyor George Washington. They probably represented a majority of the not-quite-born nation in 1774.

Thereafter, the popular leaders were in control of Congress—a control which they maintained by carefully muting their defiant rhetoric and decorating it with respectful apostrophes to the King in a declaration of American rights, and a petition for the redress of American grievances. Far more important, Congress voted to create a continental association by which the colonies agreed to cease all

imports from Great Britain on December 1, 1774, and all exports to Great Britain on September 10, 1775. To enforce this machinery, Congress urged "that a committee be chosen in every county, city and town."

Samuel Adams and the other leaders of the popular party would seem to have had good reasons for congratulating themselves on the results of the First Continental Congress. Actually, they went home with almost as many worries and doubts as exultations. They won this opening round because they were more cohesive, more thoroughly prepared, and more clever in their tactics than the disorganized conservatives and moderates. They also had a broad base of popular support, especially in Virginia and New England. In New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, crucial colonies at the heart of the incipient confederation, support for the popular leaders' program existed but was shaky.

More important, moderates and conservatives were now aware that the popular leaders constituted a party, and they too began organizing along party lines. They recognized Samuel Adams as the dominant figure. In the words of Joseph Galloway, "he was a man who eats little, drinks little, sleeps little, thinks much, and is most decisive and indefatigable in the pursuit of his object." A shrewd politician, Galloway also saw the intimate connection between "the faction" in Congress and the confrontation between the British army and the people of Massachusetts. He and others began vigorously reviving the inherent dislike of New Englanders in the rest of America.

All things considered, the future did not look especially bright for the popular leaders. If nothing dramatic occurred between the adjournment of the First Continental Congress on October 26, 1774, and May 5, 1775, the date on which they agreed to reconvene, there was a good chance that the moderates and conservatives would take control and push through a program of reconciliation with the mother country. Americans had tried economic boycotts against the British before and soon grew weary of the pain such tactics caused their own pocketbooks. A great deal therefore depended on what happened next, especially in Massachusetts.

While Samuel Adams was in the Continental Congress, one of his Massachusetts political lieutenants, Dr. Thomas Young, an organizer of the Boston tea party, assured him that when he came home he would find “the temper of your countrymen in the condition your every wish, your every sigh, for years past panted to find it. Thoroughly aroused and unanimously in earnest.” This was by no means true, as Adams discovered when he returned to Massachusetts. But Young’s extravagance would have been ruefully endorsed by Governor-General Thomas Gage.

As 1774 ended, Gage was a very disillusioned and extremely worried man. He told his superiors in England that “the proceedings of the Continental Congress astonish and terrify all considerate men.” He was gloomily certain that they would have the virtual force of law in America because there “does not appear to be resolution and strength enough among the most sensible and moderate people in any of the provinces openly to reject them.” Gage had long since given up looking for assistance from sensible and moderate men in Massachusetts.

On September 1, 1774, he had sent a detachment of 250 men to seize 125 barrels of gunpowder stored at Cambridge. The task was accomplished without resistance, but the news of the governor’s act swept through the province and an astonishing number of armed men—some said as many as 20,000—converged on Boston to do battle. The popular leaders managed to persuade them to go home without firing a shot. But the shaken Gage began fortifying the narrow neck which connected Boston to the mainland of Massachusetts. For the first time he realized there was a distinct possibility

that he and his small army of 4,000 men might be attacked.

In February, on a visit to London, Gage had told George III that the Americans would be “lyons whilst we are lambs” and had been serenely certain of restoring order in Massachusetts with four regiments. Gage had based this confidence on the assumption that the city of Boston was the only place that needed ordering. For generations, the outlying towns of Massachusetts had taken almost as dim a view of Boston as the rest of America. In 1770, when John Adams defended the British soldiers accused of the so-called Boston Massacre, he made a point of excluding Bostonians from the jury, preferring to argue his case before farmers and artisans from the Suffolk County countryside, knowing their strong disapproval of the Boston mob’s riotous tendencies.

Thanks largely to the stupidity of the British government’s Coercive Acts, the situation had been transformed. When the citizens of towns such as Lexington heard that they could hold town meetings only with the governor’s permission, that their elected representatives no longer had any voice in the appointment of judges, justices of the peace, or sheriffs, that jurymen would no longer be elected by the town, nor could they be summoned by local constables, they were outraged and insulted. They had governed themselves with these checks on arbitrary power, these guarantees that the voice of the people could be heard, for more than 100 years. Resentment swept the province—and grew more intense because the country people felt they had done little or nothing to warrant this treatment. Eagerly fanning this resentment was Samuel Adams, who worked tirelessly to create a coalition between Boston and the once hostile countryside.

Governor Gage should not have been surprised—although he was—when the towns, at Samuel Adams’ suggestion, held a series of county conventions that breathed defiance to the British government’s policy. Among the most violent were the town and county of Worcester. They declared that under no circumstances would they allow judges paid by the King and appointed by the royal governor alone to hear cases. When the judges tried to enter the courthouse on September 6th, 6,000 armed men were there to stop them and to fight any regulars that Gage might send out to assist the magistrates. The

judges were forced to parade in front of the militia companies and publicly accept the authority of the county convention. Almost plaintively, on September 25th, Gage wrote to London: "The disease was believed to have been confined to the town of Boston, from whence it might have been eradicated, no doubt, without a great deal of trouble . . . but now it is universal—there is no knowing where to apply a remedy."

Worcester's act of defiance was followed by another significant step—the reorganization of the county's militia. Under the royal government, every man between 16 and 60 belonged to the militia, was supposed to own a gun and a modest supply of ammunition, and had to report for military drill at least once a year on Training Day. But in the decade and a half of peace since the French and Indian War, militia laws had been largely neglected. The Worcester County Convention urged all the towns to meet and choose new officers by election—too many of the old officers were loyal to the Crown—and then "to enlist one-third of the men of their respective towns between sixteen and sixty years of age, to be ready to act at a minute's warning." In the next few weeks, other counties—Suffolk, Essex, Middlesex—followed Worcester's example, electing new officers to their militia regiments and choosing one-third as minutemen.

This was not a new idea. For more than 100 years, beginning with the Indian wars of the 17th century, the concept of having well-equipped mobile forces ready for quick response had been a basic part of New England's military system. It enabled the widely separated towns to mobilize rapidly and achieve numerical superiority against Indian and (later) French attack. The actual term, "minutemen," appeared for the first time in the 1750s, at the beginning of the French and Indian War. Even while on active duty, Massachusetts militia regiments were in the habit of selecting a portion of each regiment to stand ready to act "at one minute's warning."

It was only a short step to the fusion of the minutemen idea and the revolutionary movement in Massachusetts. General Gage hastened the process by deciding to cancel a meeting of the General Court—the Massachusetts legislature—which he had called for October 5th. He was certain that he could expect nothing from this assembly

but defiance. The towns and counties promptly ordered their representative to “unite with the other delegates and form a new [assembly] of your own.” Thus the first Massachusetts Provincial Congress convened in Concord on October 11, 1774.

This Congress showed some of the same tendencies displayed by the Continental Congress—a split between a minority of radicals who wanted to settle matters with guns immediately and a majority of moderates who urged patience, caution, and an attempt to solve the quarrel without bloodshed. Samuel Adams and his group pushed for the creation of an army to attack Boston and capture and kill General Gage and every one of his redcoats. The idea was condemned by moderates as “not only ridiculous, but fraught with a degree of madness.” The debate reached a climax on December 10th when Samuel Adams moved that “arms be immediately taken up against the king’s troops.” Thomas Cushing, who had also been a member of the Massachusetts delegation to the Continental Congress, arose and denounced the idea as “infamous.” He warned the delegates that “the southern colonies would not approve of it, nor stand by you.”

Adams disagreed, declaring they “would have the support and assistance of all the colonies.”

Cushing reportedly shouted, “That is a lie, Mister Adams, and I know it, and you know that I know it.”

The Provincial Congress adjourned on December 10th without reaching a decision on forming an army. Most members obviously felt they had done all that was needed to defend the colony for the time being by creating regiments of minutemen from the old militia in every county. They sent a letter to all the towns urging “that particular care should be taken . . . that each of the Minutemen, not already provided therewith, should be immediately equipped with an effective fire arm, bayonet, pouch, knapsack, 30 rounds of cartridges and balls, and that they be disciplined [trained] three times a week, and oftener, as opportunity may offer.” In accordance with the Suffolk Resolves, the Congress also appointed a receiver general to replace the man appointed to that office by Gage, and ordered all towns to cease paying their taxes to the royal government. Gage responded with a proclamation warning “subjects of the King”

against obeying this unlawful assembly.

As 1775 began, most men in Massachusetts were determined to resist any British attempt to enforce the Coercive Acts. But they were not ready to attack the King or his troops. They still retained an emotional loyalty to the King, as “the father of the country,” and blamed the crisis on George III’s greedy, power-hungry ministers. The perfect man to meet this spirit of compromise half way would seem, at first glance, to have been Governor-General Thomas Gage.

The mild-mannered Gage had been serving in America since 1754. He was married to Margaret Kemble, a daughter of one of the first families of New Jersey. When he left for England in 1773, ending (he thought) his tour as commander of the British army in the colonies, the citizens of New York gave him a testimonial dinner which hailed his “wisdom and firmness . . . magnanimity and prudence.” Gage tried manfully to exercise these same character traits in seething Massachusetts. He politely received delegations from the Provincial Congress and answered letters from concerned Americans such as Peyton Randolph of Virginia, president of the First-Continental Congress. He repeatedly insisted that he had no intention of attacking the Americans. The fortifications he was building on Boston Neck were purely defensive. He worked closely with Boston officials to prevent clashes between the townspeople and his soldiers.

Gage’s own troops were not inclined to cooperate with him. Nor were Boston’s tough ropewalkers, longshoremen, and other laborers who had been thrown out of work by the Port Bill. “The Liberty Boys,” as they were called, prowled the streets after dark, ready to pick a fight with British soldiers, officers included, and, in fact, preferred. “Bloody back,” they would sneer as a group of soldiers walked by. Few weeks passed without at least one incident which could have erupted into a city-wide riot. On November 12, 1774, a pair of officers did battle with a party of Americans armed with spiked poles, and one of the officers, a captain, was wounded. The British officers were not much better behaved. They frequently got drunk and went out looking for trouble. Some 40 of them showed up to hiss and jeer at the March 5, 1775, commemoration of the Boston Massacre.







Gage punished lawbreakers among his troops far more severely than Boston handled its own criminals or unruly elements. This did not endear him to his men. They had no sympathy for the colonial cause and utter contempt for American military pretensions. Thirty-two-year-old Earl Percy, colonel of the 5th Regiment and acting brigadier general, wrote to his father on November 25, 1774: "The people here are the most designing, artful villians in the world. They have not the least idea of either religion or morality. . . . Like all other cowards, they are cruel and tyrannical. To hear them talk, you would imagine that they would attack us and demolish us every night. And yet whenever we appear they are frightened out of their wits." If a nobleman like Percy felt this way, it was inevitable that the rest of the army would have a low opinion of Gage's policy of refusing to strike the first blow.

Lt. John Barker of the light infantry company of the 4th (King's Own) Regiment complained mightily to his diary about Gage's order to jail every soldier found fighting with the inhabitants until "the matter is enquired into. By whom? By villians that would not censure one of their own vagrants even if he attempted the life of a soldier. Whereas if a soldier errs in the least, who is more ready to accuse him than Tommy?"

But behind his mild facade, General Gage was doing everything in his power to prepare for war. On December 14, 1774, he wrote to the Secretary at War: "Affairs are at a crisis, and if you give way it is for ever." He bolstered his small force with regiments drawn from Quebec, New York, New Jersey, and Newfoundland. More important, by spending some coin of the realm, Gage was able to find out what the American leaders were thinking and doing in the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. On his payroll was plump Dr. Benjamin Church, ostensibly one of the most ardent patriots and a member of the Committee of Safety, the executive arm of the Provincial Congress.

Church and other informants sent Gage valuable data about the divisions within the Provincial Congress over forming an army and the troubles they were having getting cannon, powder, and other supplies to maintain one. Gage's informers soon told him that the main supply depot was Concord, the town where the Provincial

Congress was meeting. As 1775 began, Gage's intelligence was good enough to keep him alert to the most minor movements of the Massachusetts leaders. Every trip made by silversmith Paul Revere, their semi-official courier, was carefully noted, and usually Gage knew why he made it.

At the same time, Gage repeatedly tried to impress on the British government in London his need for strong reinforcements. As early as September 25th, not long after he congratulated Peyton Randolph, the president of the Continental Congress, for the moderate and temperate tone of the statement calling for a redress of American grievances, Gage was telling his superiors that Britain could not have her own way in America except by "conquering and to do that effectually, to prevent further bickerings, you should have an army near twenty thousand strong composed of regulars, a large body of good irregulars . . . and three or four regiments of light horse, these exclusive of a good and sufficient field artillery."

In another letter Gage gave an even more cogent reason for his insistence that "a very respectable force should take the field. . . . A check anywhere would be fatal, and the first stroke will decide a great deal." There was a lot of realism in this assessment. Gage knew that moderates and conservatives outside Massachusetts were telling Americans that it was madness to challenge the British to war. Break the rebels here with one decisive blow, Gage reasoned, and the spirit of resistance would vanish elsewhere. A defeat, on the other hand, would encourage those who called for defiance in other colonies.

Meanwhile in the countryside American minutemen were responding with the utmost seriousness to the Provincial Congress' order to drill three times a week or more. About one-third of these men had served in the wars with France. These veterans were frequently elected captains, lieutenants, and ensigns of the new companies. The morale of these companies was high. When one town tried to pay them, they replied, "They had inlisted Volunteers so they do & will Remain Volunteers."

Another reason for their high morale was their determination to prove they were the equal of the British regulars, if it came to a fight. They knew the regulars despised them as an undisciplined rab-

ble, and they resented the numerous British slurs on their military performance in the French wars. This time they were determined to do better. The British officers whom Gage sent into the country to map roads and scout the situation toward the end of February 1775, watched from the window of the Buckminster Tavern as the Framingham company of minutemen conducted its drill exercises. The officers were impressed by the skill with which they performed the manual of arms and listened while the company commander told the minutemen “they would always conquer if they did not break, and recommended them to charge us coolly and wait for our fire, and everything would succeed with them.”

Gage was also doing his best to drill and train the men of his small army. Here he was at a disadvantage seldom noted by historians. Most of Gage’s soldiers and a high percentage of his officers had never been in combat. Several of his regiments, such as the 10th, had not even seen combat in the French and Indian War but had done garrison duty in the West Indies, Gibraltar, or other outposts of the empire. “General Gage dare not venture his troops, most of which are newly raised and never in action,” wrote one Bostonian in the fall of 1774.

During the winter months Gage had his men practice firing at targets set up on flats in the Charles River at the foot of Boston common. He also gave his light infantry companies—there was one of these units in each regiment—instructions on how to fight as skirmishers along a line of march. They were taught to fire their weapons from behind trees and walls, and, according to one observer, even “while lying on their bellies.”

Gage had fought in America throughout the French and Indian War and helped the British army develop tactics for forest fighting. He had no illusions about how the Americans would fight, if war began: “The first opposition would be irregular, impetuous and incessant from the numerous Bodys that would swarm to the place of action, and all actuated by an enthusiasm wild and ungovernable.” Thanks to his spies, Gage also knew what the minutemen were doing. He even had a good estimate of their numbers. “The Minutemen amount to fifteen thousand are the picked men of the whole body

of militia and all properly armed," he told his superiors in London.

Gage also knew something else—knowledge that would eventually have fateful consequences. "Their whole magazine of powder consisting of between ninety and a hundred barrels is at Concord." (A hundred barrels of powder was a pathetically small reserve for 15,000 men. The Provincial Congress had set 1,000 barrels as a minimum and had fallen far short of this goal.) A tempting thought undoubtedly occurred to General Gage the moment he received this information. He knew that the Provincial Congress which had reconvened on February 15, 1775, was debating once more the formation of a standing "army of observation" which would be recruited from all four New England provinces. If he somehow managed a swift march to Concord, seized or destroyed the gunpowder as well as 14 cannon reported to be in the town, it would have a crippling, perhaps demoralizing impact on plans for that army. Gage had already struck one highly effective blow of this sort in September, when he seized 125 barrels of powder from the Cambridge powder house.

Gunpowder was undoubtedly on Gage's mind when he began sending his troops on marches into the countryside early in 1775. It was also good for the troops to get them out of hostile Boston, give them some exercise, and make them familiar with the terrain over which they might soon have to fight. Each march also tested the provincial warning system. Gage hoped that if five or six alerts turned out to be false alarms—the regulars were just marching along molesting neither persons nor property—the minutemen might grow weary or careless about responding.

Instead of growing weary, the Americans turned out in force every time the British appeared outside Boston. They saw these confrontations in different terms. When the British turned back, the minutemen were convinced they had done so because they had lost their nerve. This impression was confirmed, in local opinion, by what happened at Salem toward the end of February.

Gage learned that the provincials had gathered some 20 cannon at a Salem forge where they were building carriages for the guns. The general ordered Lt. Col. Alexander Leslie to march his 64th Regiment aboard a transport and sail to the port city by night to seize

these weapons. Lack of cannon would cripple the proposed New England "army of observation" as much as a shortage of powder. Leslie landed his men near Marblehead and marched for Salem. He arrived to find the townspeople hoisting the draw on the bridge across the North River between him and the forge. Leslie ordered the men on the other side of the river to lower the draw again. They refused and Leslie ordered a company to aim their guns at them. Leslie was warned that he had no right to fire on the people without orders. Some people told him, "you had better be damned than fire—if you fire you'll all be dead men." Minutemen, they said, were assembling from all directions.

Leslie said he had orders to cross the bridge and search the forge and by God he would do it. What happened next is something of a mystery. According to Leslie's report, the Americans lowered the drawbridge and he marched across, searched the forge, and decided that the cannon were crude guns taken from ships and not worth capturing. According to the Americans, they agreed to lower the bridge and Leslie agreed to march over it and no more than 30 rods beyond it, to satisfy the letter of his orders, and then march back to his ship.

What really happened is not as important as the fact that the provincial version of the story was spread throughout Massachusetts. People in Lexington and other towns read the statement made to Leslie ("You have no right to fire without orders") and saw no contradiction from the British colonel. They glowed with satisfaction at having frustrated another of Gage's schemes by a determined show of force.

On March 30, 1775, Gage sent a full brigade of his army—1,200 men—into the country under the command of Brig. Gen. Lord Percy. Again minutemen companies swarmed from all the neighboring towns. Some provincials tore up the bridge over the Charles River at Cambridge. Percy ignored them and continued down the south side of the Charles to another bridge at Watertown. There he found his path blocked by minutemen and two cannon. Again Percy ignored them, marched to Jamaica Plain and back to Boston while companies of minutemen watched him from a distance. Again the Americans went

home convinced that they had foiled another British scheme, this one possibly a march to Concord to seize the members of the Provincial Congress.

Unwittingly, Gage was building up the confidence of the minutemen by giving them a chance to see how rapidly companies turned out from each town. Although an army had not yet been formed, each company was acquiring a sense of belonging to a large determined force, much larger than the regiments or even the brigade that Gage sent against them.

The Provincial Congress was not amused by Gage's marches. On the same day that Percy marched to Jamaica Plain, the congress resolved "that whenever the Army under the command of General Gage, or any part thereof to the Number of Five Hundred, shall march out of the Town of Boston, with Artillery and Baggage, it ought to be deemed a design to carry into execution by Force the late acts of Parliament, the attempting which . . . ought to be opposed; and therefore the Military Force of the Province ought to be assembled. . . ."

A few days later, Gage's spy, Dr. Benjamin Church, warned him that the Provincial Congress had resolved to resist another march like Percy's to the last extremity. Then came news from abroad that aroused the Americans to new vigor. The province of Massachusetts had been declared by Parliament to be in a state of rebellion. The British were sending Gage reinforcements—more infantry regiments and a cavalry regiment. The Provincial Congress immediately began drawing up rules and regulations for an army. Dr. Church kept Gage in close touch with all their supposedly secret deliberations. Finally, on April 15th, came the news that Gage dreaded. Congress had voted to send delegates to the other New England provinces to discuss the creation of an army. The spy added, "A sudden blow struck now or immediately on the arrival of the reinforcements from England should they come within a fortnight would upset all their plans."

The stage was almost set for the collision at Lexington.

March to Lexington

On April 14, 1775, the day before Gage heard the news about the imminent creation of a New England army, a young British army captain named Oliver De Lancey debarked from H.M.S. *Nautilus* at Boston and handed Gage “secret” orders from the British Cabinet. De Lancey was American born, the son of one of the leading families of the colony of New York. The secret orders consisted of a long letter from Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the American Colonies. It confirmed the news that Parliament had declared Massachusetts in rebellion and it also informed Gage that the King and his ministers were very dissatisfied with his performance as Governor. Along with his reinforcements, Gage was told that he was getting three major generals to assist him. Gage instantly suspected that one of these gentlemen would be his replacement, if his stock dropped any lower in London.

Dartmouth’s letter made it clear that the government wanted Gage to act as soon as possible. The reinforcements they were sending were nowhere near the 20,000-man army Gage had advised for a decisive first stroke. But Dartmouth, writing with the serene confidence of someone 3,000 miles away from the realities Gage faced, pontificated that “a small force now, if put to the test, would be able to encounter them with greater probability of success than might be expected from a greater army, if the people would be suffered to form themselves upon a more regular plan.” Dartmouth told Gage that he should arrest “the principal actors and abettors in the Provincial Congress” even if it meant “a signal for hostilities.”

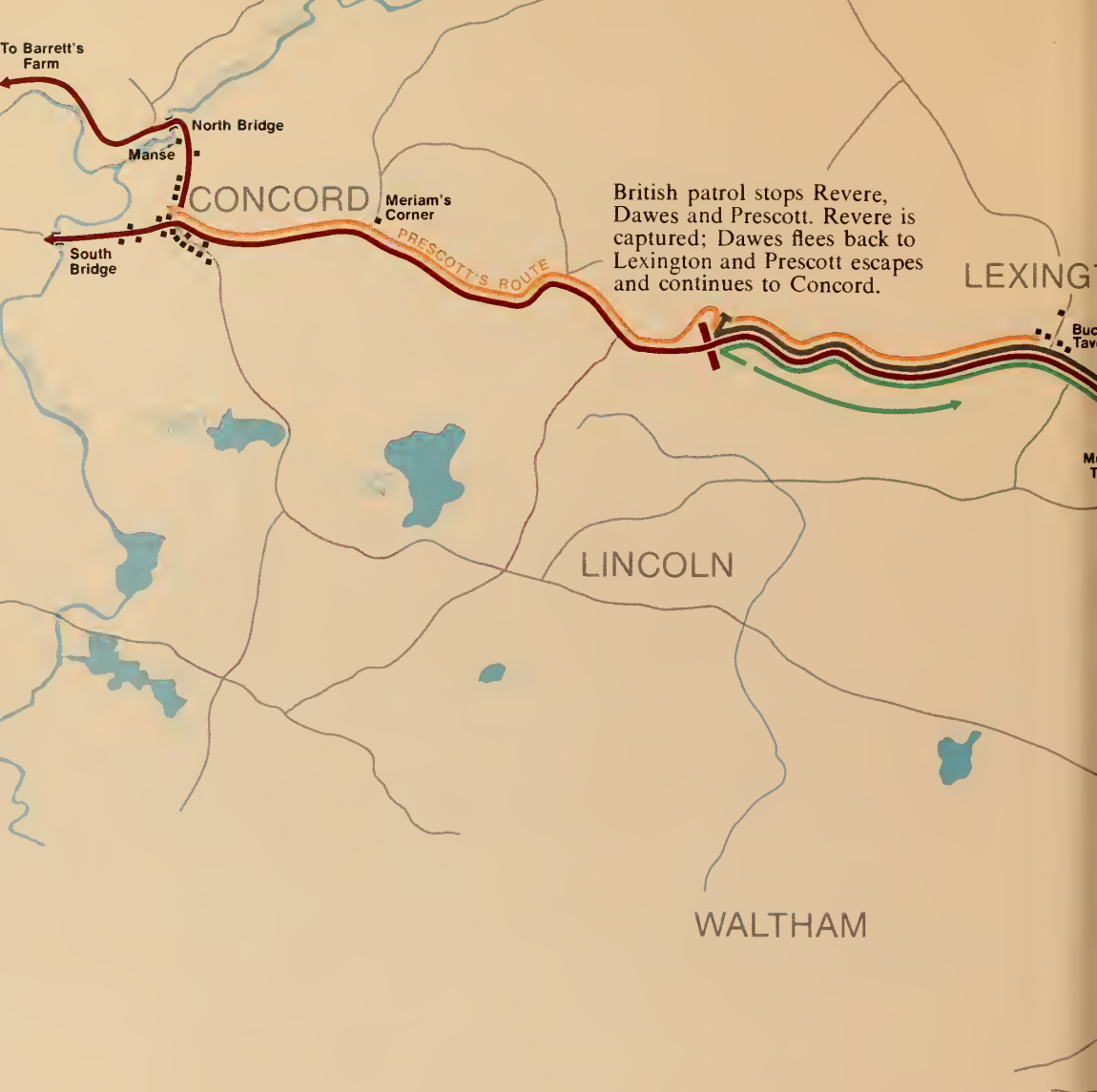
The cold, scolding tone of Dartmouth’s letter and the knowledge that the reinforcements would

be inadequate transformed the idea of seizing the gunpowder and cannon at Concord from a temptation to an imperative in Gage's mind. The New England army had to be crippled before it assembled. Only then would he be in a position to make the first stroke of the war a decisive one. In no sense of the term did Gage think of the expedition to Concord as this first stroke. He hoped to accomplish it without firing a shot if all went well.

With Massachusetts declared to be in rebellion, he had a legal right to seize any and all weapons and ammunition he could find. If Samuel Adams and his friends retaliated with an assault on Boston, they would be risking the very thing they dreaded—looking like aggressors and thereby losing the support of the moderate Americans in the middle and southern colonies. Gage told himself (and hoped others would see it the same way) that he was not planning to attack Americans—not at the moment, anyway. He was only trying to deprive them of the ability to attack him.

To guarantee success, Gage chose his best troops—the light infantry and grenadier companies from each regiment and from the 400-man Royal Marine battalion he had brought ashore from the navy's ships. Gage told them that they were being brought together for training in “new evolutions.” At their head he placed Lt. Col. Francis Smith of the 10th Regiment, the senior officer among his regimental commanders. Maj. John Pitcairn of the Marines was made his second in command. Although Smith was fat, and tended to be slow-moving, he was also a level-headed, experienced officer. Pitcairn was one of the most popular officers in the garrison. Even rebellious Bostonians liked him.

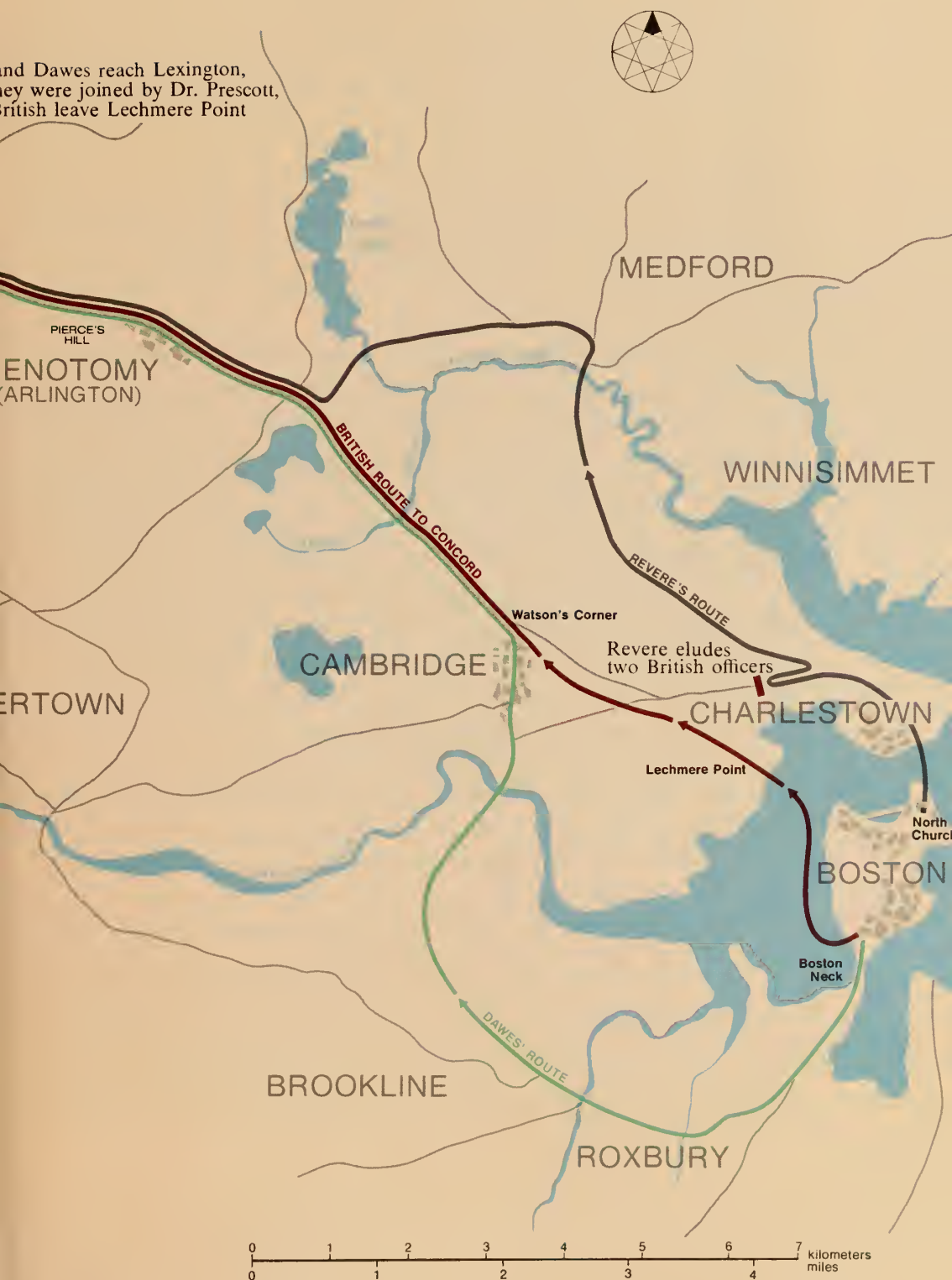
Gage wrote out an order for Smith, directing him to destroy all military stores “collected at Concord, for the Avowed Purpose of raising and supporting a Rebellion against His Majesty.” Smith was to march with “the utmost expedition and secrecy.” He was to take care “that the soldiers do not plunder the Inhabitants or hurt private property.” He was told in great detail how to destroy cannon, ruin barrels of pork or beef, throw powder into the river, and burn tents. There was no specific mention of what Smith should do if he was opposed by armed Americans.



Ordered to seize arms and military provisions at Concord, 21 companies of British regulars were ferried across the Charles River from Boston late on the night of April 18, 1775. At dawn the following day, after a slow night march, they were met on Lexington Green by a handful of local militiamen who had been forewarned of the raid by patriot messengers Paul Revere and William Dawes. After a brief but bloody encounter, the British marched on to Concord where local residents, alerted by Dr. Samuel Prescott, managed to hide or destroy most of the military stores before the soldiers arrived.

The British March to LEXINGTON & CONCORD April 18-19, 1775

and Dawes reach Lexington,
they were joined by Dr. Prescott,
British leave Lechmere Point



Thanks to the efficiency of his own spies, Gage knew that the Americans in Boston were watching every move he and his soldiers made. When Dr. Church first stirred the idea of a march to Concord in Gage's mind, the governor-general had asked the admiral in command of the British fleet, Samuel Graves, to be ready to move troops from Boston across Back Bay to a place from which they could march inland. Graves had ordered longboats lowered from his men-of-war so they would be ready on short notice. The Bostonians had instantly spotted these boats and sent Paul Revere to Concord with a warning letter. Gage's paid informers duly reported the trip and told him that the provincials were not a little panic-stricken by the news and were desperately trying to move gunpowder and other war materiel out of Concord without much success.

With so many Bostonians out of work and the spirit of resistance fired to such a fever pitch, the slightest change in the routine of the Royal Army was instantly noticed and reported to their political leaders. Even though Gage issued no orders when he relieved the light infantry and grenadier companies from duty, the Bostonians instantly deduced that they were getting ready for an expedition. Within 24 hours it was the poorest-kept military secret in history. So many people in Massachusetts knew about it that a committee of representatives from the Provincial Congress, which had adjourned on April 15th, sent messengers galloping to all parts of Massachusetts urging an immediate return to Concord "to discuss the industrious preparations making in Boston for a speedy march into the country."

Much has been made of the swiftness with which the Americans penetrated Gage's plans. But other evidence suggests that the general may have expected this to happen and laid plans of his own to frustrate the Americans' probable countermoves. First, the expedition was to be a night march—a fact which gave the British an instant advantage over minutemen. Second, early on the evening of April 18th, Gage sent into the countryside a mounted patrol of 10 officers and 10 sergeants. They had orders to guard the roads out of Boston and Charlestown and seize any messengers the Bostonians might send to warn Concord and the surrounding towns. Even more often than the marches of the troops, small parties of officers had ridden into the

countryside, ostensibly for exercise and recreation. Gage thought this rather large group might repeat the performance without arousing the provincials. A few hours later, the light infantry and grenadiers were alerted in their barracks and told to assemble at the foot of the Boston common at 9:30 p.m. for the boat ride across Back Bay.

Almost immediately, things began to go wrong. The navy failed to supply enough longboats to take the soldiers across in a single passage. No one was put in charge of the embarkation. The men were left to scramble into boats haphazardly. This meant that much time was lost on the other side arranging the companies for the march. It was after midnight before the second half of the column reached the shore at Lechmere Point, in a direct line from present Arlington Street in Boston.

More time was lost getting the light infantry companies positioned at the head of the column. There was another wait while provisions were brought from the boats. Most of the men threw them away. Suspecting that a march was in the making, they had already stuffed food into their packs. While they waited, the tide came in and before they reached the road they found themselves wading through an inlet 3 feet deep. They finally reached the road not far from present Union Square, near Prospect Hill, and by about 1:30 a.m. were on the Lexington Road (present Massachusetts Avenue).

Elsewhere, the Massachusetts men were hard at work frustrating Gage's plan for secrecy and surprise. At dusk, a Lexington man spotted some of the officers assigned to guard the roads and warned William Munroe, proprietor of the Munroe Tavern in Lexington. Munroe was orderly sergeant (the equivalent of a first sergeant today) of the Lexington militia company. He stationed a nine-man guard outside the Rev. Jonas Clark's house on the Bedford Road, a few hundred yards from the common. Samuel Adams and John Hancock were living there. They had been riding over to Concord each day to attend the sessions of the Provincial Congress. Now they were preparing to depart for Philadelphia for the second session of the Continental Congress.

In Boston, Paul Revere, knowing something "serious was to be transacted," made arrangements with several men in Charlestown,

across the harbor from Boston, to spread the alarm if he had trouble getting out of the city. A friend would exhibit two lanterns in the North Church steeple if the British were going by water, and one if they were marching out by land across Boston Neck. The shrewd silversmith also arranged to have a horse waiting for him in Charlestown.

Revere got out of Boston with no difficulty. Two friends rowed him across the river, well seaward of the British man-of-war *Somerset* guarding the ferry way. To make doubly sure word reached the countryside, Dr. Joseph Warren sent 30-year-old William Dawes across Boston Neck, the alternate route, and Revere had the lanterns set in the North Church steeple, just in case he was stopped by *Somerset*. Mounted on a powerful mare, Revere easily eluded two British officers who tried to seize him near Cambridge and took an alternate route to Lexington. Dawes found a friendly soldier guarding the gate at Boston Neck and was let out without a challenge. Both men reached the Clark parsonage in Lexington before the sluggish Smith and his expedition even began their march from Lechmere Point. Sergeant Munroe sent a messenger racing to Capt. John Parker's house and he in turn ordered an immediate muster of the town's militia company on the green. The meeting house bell tolled, and in a half hour or so—about 1 a.m.—the 130 members of the Lexington company were in line. They included both militia and those members (about one-third of the total) who had volunteered to be minutemen. After conferring about what to do, and resolving not “to make or meddle with the . . . regulars,” Captain Parker dismissed them.

Meanwhile, Dawes and Revere remounted and rode for Concord. Their luck ran out about 2 miles short of their goal. A Gage patrol led by Maj. Edward Mitchell of the 5th Regiment seized them and a third rider, Dr. Samuel Prescott, who had met them while returning from a visit to his fiancée. The British officers forced them into a pasture.

Dr. Prescott was a “high Son of Liberty” and was as determined to spread the alarm as Dawes and Revere. “Put on,” he whispered to Revere, and they broke away in opposite directions. Dawes whirled his horse and raced down the road toward Lexington. Prescott and

Dawes escaped their pursuers. Revere was recaptured and had a tense conversation with Major Mitchell, who held a gun to his head and told him to tell the truth or he would blow out his brains. Revere told the major that 500 men were gathering between where they stood and Boston and coolly took the credit for it, saying he had “alarmed the country all the way up.” For an added fillip he told him that “their troops had caught aground in passing the river,” so they could expect no assistance from the column they were awaiting.

Considerably unnerved, Mitchell and his men decided to retreat. As they neared Lexington, they heard a gun go off, then a full volley which further agitated the major and his companions. They did not know that the gunfire was the Lexington militia company simply clearing their guns when Captain Parker dismissed them. Mitchell decided it might be dangerous to cross Lexington common with prisoners. Besides Revere, he had three Lexington militiamen whom he had captured when they followed him up the road to Concord earlier in the night. He forced Revere to give his big mare to a sergeant of the grenadiers who was riding a small horse that was growing tired. The British then let their four prisoners go, after cutting the bridles and saddles off their horses.

Revere went straight to Samuel Adams and John Hancock and told them what was happening. Hancock seized a musket and swore he would join the militiamen on the green. Sam Adams coolly disagreed. “That is not our business; we belong to the Cabinet,” he said. After a great deal of argument, Hancock was finally persuaded that he and Adams should leave Lexington as soon as possible for safer quarters in nearby Woburn.

Meanwhile, Colonel Smith, Major Pitcairn, and their men were trudging toward Lexington. At the head of the column rode Captain Brown and Ensign DeBerniere, who had made a reconnaissance trip to Concord a few weeks before, and Daniel Murray, a Harvard graduate of 1772 who knew the countryside even better than the two officers. With them was Lt. William Sutherland, who had joined the expedition without orders when he saw them embarking at the foot of Boston common. A marine lieutenant named Adair, a surgeon’s mate named Simms of the 43rd regiment, and an artillery officer

named Grant completed this motley, rather nervous group.

The advance guard had their hands full just trying to control the unexpectedly heavy traffic on the road. General Gage's patrols were obviously too few to assure secrecy, even if he had managed to outwit the Bostonians. First the British captured two Lexington farmers who had been taking a wagonload of milk to Boston. They had pulled off the road, unhitched their horses and tried to ride past the advance guard to sound the alarm. Next, the officers scooped up Asahel Porter of Woburn, who was also on his way to the Boston markets. Then came three scouts sent out by Captain Parker on lumbering farm horses. They too were seized and sent back to the light infantry marching a few hundred yards behind the advance guard.

Far more alarming than these early captured farmers was the unexpected arrival of Major Mitchell and his party. The major had believed Paul Revere's story about 500 minutemen assembling. He told the officers in the advance guard that he and his companions had barely escaped with their lives. He rode down the column and repeated the story to Smith and Pitcairn.

Mitchell arrived just as Smith, realizing he had made a dangerously late start, was ordering Pitcairn to take six light infantry companies and march ahead as rapidly as possible to seize the bridges at Concord. When the colonel heard Mitchell's hair-raising, largely imaginary tale, he ordered another officer to return to Boston immediately and tell Gage they would probably need reinforcements before the day was over.

Pitcairn now rode to the head of the six foremost light infantry companies and ordered them to double their pace. A few minutes later he found Lieutenant Sutherland talking to a well dressed man in a sulky. What he was doing on the road at 3 a.m. has never been explained, but he told the two British officers there were 600 men waiting to fight them at Lexington green. They met another man with a load of wood who told them 1,000 men were waiting for them at Concord.

But it was the men on Lexington green who were on Pitcairn's mind. He ordered flankers into the road on either side of the column

and moved ahead at a more cautious pace. Major Mitchell joined Pitcairn and Sutherland at the head of the column. Mitchell no doubt repeated his conviction that they were headed for a battle. Lieutenants Sutherland and Adair spurred their horses ahead and spotted a number of armed men hurrying along the ridge lines on either side of the road toward Lexington. Sutherland saw a man in a field on his right aiming his musket at him. He pulled the trigger and there was a small spurt of flame and a tiny puff of smoke—the musket had flashed in the pan. Sutherland and Adair galloped back to Pitcairn in great excitement and told him what had happened.

Grimly, Pitcairn ordered his light infantrymen to halt in the road and load their guns. He later claimed to have also told the troops that under no circumstances were they to fire without an order. But the concatenation of alarms and threats they had encountered on the road made this warning an empty formality to men who had spent most of the previous year cooped up in Boston being baited by “Yankees.” The British light infantry arrived on Lexington green ready—even eager—to fight. The sight of Captain Parker and his men with guns in their hands was all the excuse they needed to start shooting.

The Capture of Concord

The killing of Parker's men on Lexington green revealed some of the deficiencies of the Massachusetts defense system. The politicians had generated an extraordinary amount of enthusiasm for their cause, and the minuteman concept, backed by a network of spies and alarm riders, was well-designed to frustrate a British surprise move. But the provincial leaders had given very little thought to what to do after the surprise move was detected. Captain Parker positioned his men on the north corner of Lexington green because he could think of nothing else to do. He had no orders to fire on British soldiers the moment he saw them. On the contrary, he had heard politicians like Samuel Adams and ministers like Jonas Clark insist that the minutemen were organized to defend their homes and their families against a British attack.

Parker also believed that the British had strict orders not to fire on Americans unless they fired first. This was why he placed his men in their exposed position on the green. As captain, he was responsible for their safety. No power in the world, not even Samuel Adams or Jonas Clark at their most eloquent, could have persuaded Parker to put his men there if he thought the British were going to fire on them at point-blank range. Never in his wildest dreams would he have blocked the British line of march, as he is often pictured doing in popular prints. This would have been an unforgivably reckless invitation to gunfire.

Almost certainly, Parker never told his men to "stand your ground. . . . If they mean to have a war let it begin here." He was a sensible man and saw no reason to begin a war by having himself and his men commit suicide. The Lexington company were tragic victims of one of those unreal

moments when two nations are moving towards war, yet neither wishes to strike the first blow, and many on both sides cannot bring themselves to believe that the blow will really be struck, that guns will go off, that men will really bleed and die.

This sense of unreality prevailed even after the British left Lexington and resumed their march toward Concord at about 5:30 a.m. When they were about 2 miles from Concord, they saw a company of armed provincials in the road and more men on the long ridge that ran like a huge arrowhead eastward from the center of the town for almost a mile, ending above the crossroads called Meriam's Corner. But the provincials retreated without firing a shot at them.

So far, the people of Concord knew nothing about the slaughter on Lexington green. They were relying more on subterfuge than force. Almost every man, woman, and child of reasonable age had been working frantically to hide the food, gunpowder, cannon, and other stores that had been streaming into the town. They had known the British were coming since 1 a.m., when Dr. Prescott, Paul Revere's volunteer replacement, arrived to sound the alarm.

They had a lot to hide. The notebooks of Col. James Barrett, commander of the town's militia, record the receipt of 20,000 pounds of musket balls and cartridges, 50 reams of cartridge paper, 206 tents, 113 iron spades, 51 wood axes, 80 barrels of beef, 35 half-barrels of powder, 318 barrels of flour, 17,000 pounds of salt fish, 35,000 pounds of rice, and 50 barrels of salt.

Some of this accumulation had already been moved to other towns. Much of it remained in Concord, and had to be hastily hidden in barns and houses throughout the town. Near dawn, Colonel Barrett pronounced himself satisfied and Concord's two minuteman companies and two militia companies mustered in front of the Wright Tavern. They were joined by a Lincoln company of minutemen who brought the rumor that there had been shooting at Lexington. A few minutes later, a scout whom Barrett had sent down the road to that town came pounding to the tavern door. He said he had reached Lexington green just as the regulars opened fire on Parker's men.

"Were they firing ball?" asked Barret, in evident disbelief.

"I don't know," said Brown, "but I think it probable."



After destroying any military supplies they could find, the British troops made a brief stand at the North Bridge before being forced back into Concord by Colonel Barrett's militia. The march back to Boston was a nightmare for the British, as the Americans, joined along the way by fresh militia units from nearby towns and villages, continually fired on them from behind trees, walls, and houses. Despite reinforcements brought to Lexington by Lord Percy, the British fought a running battle all the way to Charlestown.

CONCORD

and the British Retreat

April 19, 1775



0 1 2 3 kilometers
0 1 2 miles

Gray roads are principal present-day highways.

Like the men of Lexington, Concord's soldiers shared the widespread conviction that the British were forbidden to shoot bullets (ball) at Americans.

More and more men arrived with reports that the British were on the road to Concord. Colonel Barrett ordered Capt. David Brown and his company of minutemen to advance down the road to Meriam's Corner. Under no circumstances was he to make a stand there. Two militia companies were to move down the ridge above the road at the same time. They were commanded by Capt. Nathan Barrett and George Minott, Colonel Barrett's son and son-in-law. The colonel hoped that a show of force would convince the British that it would be best if they turned around and headed back to Boston. He moved the rest of his men to the crest of this same ridge, just above the town's burial ground.

Unlike Captain Parker at Lexington, Colonel Barrett was expecting trouble. His orders to his men make it clear that he was no mere farmer. A 65-year-old veteran of the French wars, he had said he was too old when his fellow citizens elected him colonel of the militia regiment. They had told him they only wanted his advice. Although he also had to worry about last-minute efforts to hide still more of the stores, he more than demonstrated his military competence by the cool careful orders he gave his men. He understood the importance of controlling the high ground—the hills around Concord. Thanks to Barrett, there was no chance of the Lexington massacre being repeated on a bigger scale in Concord.

Out on the road near Meriam's Corner, the British advance guard paused for a moment at the sight of Captain Brown's company of minutemen in the road ahead of them and the other two companies on the ridge above them. Then an order was barked and all 10 companies of light infantrymen opened ranks and moved off the road up the hill toward the men on the crest of the ridge. With fifes playing and drums beating, the grenadier companies and the officers and guides of the advance guard resumed their march toward the men in the road.

Strictly obeying Colonel Barrett's orders, and faced with the evident fact that they were heavily outnumbered, the men on the ridge

fell back toward Concord. On the road, Captain Brown and his company did a smart about-face and in excellent formation marched back to town so close to the grenadiers that they were able to pick up the beat of their drums. "We had grand musick," recalled one of the militiamen.

When his three companies reached Concord, Colonel Barrett promptly withdrew them some 400 yards to the northern end of the ridge. Although he abandoned the town's liberty pole, which the light infantry cut down, Barrett still kept the high ground, making it difficult for the British to attack him. He was still east of the North Bridge, close to the center of the town, in a good position to see what the British were going to do in Concord. The whole thing might turn out to be a bluff, as at Salem. Perhaps all they wanted to do was show the provincials they could march to Concord any time they chose. They might turn around and march back to Boston without firing a shot.

Colonel Smith was not interested in what Colonel Barrett was thinking. Having reached Concord without additional gunfire, he assumed that the provincials were intimidated and proceeded to carry out his search and destroy orders. One company of light infantry was hustled to guard the South Bridge over the Concord River. The seven remaining companies of light infantry, under the command of Capt. Lawrence Parsons of the 10th Regiment, were ordered to the North Bridge. There, Parsons had orders to detach three of them and march an additional 2 miles to Colonel Barrett's farm where Gage's spies had reported substantial quantities of stores and some cannon.

When Parsons and his light infantry headed for the North Bridge, Barrett immediately ordered another retreat across the same bridge to high ground on the west side of the Concord River. His decision provoked a heated argument among Concord's leaders. William Emerson, the town's minister, was in favor of "making a stand, notwithstanding the superiority of their number." He preferred death to another retreat. Others wanted to launch an attack on the redcoats immediately. "Let us go and meet them," one said. Still not aware that blood had been shed at Lexington, another said, "No, it will not do for us to begin the war."

What probably influenced Colonel Barrett as much as this consideration was the fact that the British still outnumbered him heavily. At this point there were only about eight or nine companies of minutemen or militia under his command, mustering approximately 250 men against 21 British companies, numbering at least 700. But Barrett knew that reinforcements were hurrying toward Concord from all points of the compass. In a 5-mile circle that included Concord and Lexington were 75 companies of minutemen and militia totaling 6,000 men. It made no sense to fight the British until their numbers were at least equal.

William Emerson and several minutemen were loath to abandon their houses and their wives and children, and dropped out of the formation to go home. Emerson's house (now known as the Old Manse) stood within 100 yards of the bridge. A crowd of women and children gathered in the yard, and Emerson did his best to soothe their fears. Barrett was doing the same thing with an even larger crowd of civilians who had joined the fighting men on the ridge. He had them escorted over the bridge to Punkatasset Hill, about a mile to the west of town, well out of musket shot. Then Barrett told his second in command, 45-year-old Maj. John Buttrick, to take charge while he galloped ahead of the British to make sure the guns and stores at his farm were well concealed.

Buttrick ordered the men to advance to a lower hill closer to the river, where the British at the bridge could be watched more closely. The hill was part of the Buttrick farm. The major's 60-year-old house, a rectangular 2-story building, was visible from where he stood. The Buttrick family had been living in Concord since 1635. John Buttrick's son was a fifer in Captain Brown's company of minutemen.

Down in Concord, meanwhile, the grenadiers were searching for the hidden cannon and stores. Major Pitcairn and Colonel Smith stayed in the center of town to supervise this operation. Because of their strict orders to destroy no private property, it soon became an exercise in frustration. When the grenadiers searched the barn of Timothy Wheeler, they found a lot more flour than an ordinary farmer could possibly use. Wheeler received the soldiers with the

utmost cordiality and pointed to several bags of his own flour which he had stacked in front of the small mountain destined for the New England Army. "This is my flour," he told the British officer in charge of the grenadiers. "I am a miller, sir. Yonder stands my mill; I get my living by it. In the winter I grind a great deal of grain, and get it ready for market in the spring." Carefully placing his hands on his own casks, he repeated, "This is my flour; this is my wheat; this is my rye. This is mine."

"Well," said the officer in charge, "we do not injure private property." He and his men withdrew.

The grenadiers were more successful at the malt house of Ebenezer Hubbard. There they found about a hundred barrels of flour. They smashed some of them and dumped the contents on the ground. Growing tired of this heavy work, they rolled the rest into the nearby millpond. This was a mistake. The flour swelled, caulked the seams of the barrels, and most of the contents was recovered undamaged. Musket balls discovered in several houses were also flung into the pond in wholesale lots and later retrieved by the determined provincials.

The only British discovery of any significance were three 24-pounder cannons in the town jailyard. Ephraim Jones, who was both an innkeeper and the jailer, tried to lock the British out of both places. In an upper room of the inn was the chest of the treasurer of the Provincial Congress. Pitcairn ordered the grenadiers to break down the door and forced Jones at pistol point to tell them where the cannon were buried in the jailyard. The grenadiers knocked off their trunnions and destroyed their carriages. Then Pitcairn good-naturedly marched Jones back to his inn, which was next door to the jail, and ordered a hearty breakfast. Jones gave him an exact bill, and Pitcairn paid it without a murmur.

While Pitcairn breakfasted, searching grenadiers were being frustrated upstairs by a clever young woman. Blocking the door to the room containing the chest of the treasurer of the Provincial Congress, she heatedly insisted that it was her room and her chest. The grenadiers mumbled their orders to respect private property and retreated.

In the townhouse (or courthouse) the grenadiers found a num-

ber of wooden entrenching tools, gun carriages, tents, cartridge paper, and other combustible war material. They piled it in the street and started a bonfire. Some sparks ignited the townhouse roof. Mrs. Martha Moulton, an old woman who lived nearby, approached Pitcairn and four or five other officers, who were sitting in front of the house watching the blaze. She had a pail of water in her hand and she begged them to order the grenadiers to douse the smoldering roof. After first trying to shoo her away, they finally consented and sent some grenadiers upstairs with buckets of water. They soon ended the threat of a fire that might, in Mrs. Moulton's opinion, have burnt down a row of four or five houses, including her own, as well as the courthouse.

By now it was between 9:30 and 10. Colonel Barrett rejoined his men on the hill above the North Bridge, having done all he could to conceal the guns and stores at his farm. Below them, three British companies guarded the bridge. Originally, two had been positioned on small hills a few hundred yards in advance of it. But as the militiamen moved closer, they had fallen back to the bridge itself. The provincials had been reinforced by a steady stream of minuteman companies from Littleton, Chelmsford, Carlyle, Westford, Groton, Stowe, and Acton, swelling their ranks to perhaps as many as 500 men. The British light infantry guarding the bridge numbered less than a hundred. Captain Parsons had taken the other four companies with him for the march to Barrett's farm.

Many men in the ranks chafed at Barrett's refusal to attack. But Barrett, still without certain knowledge of the bloodshed at Lexington, remained determined not to start the war. He conferred with Major Buttrick and Lt. Col. John Robinson, second in command of a minuteman regiment from towns north and west of Concord, some of whose men were already on the scene. As they discussed their next move, Lt. Joseph Hosmer, who had been acting as adjutant of the Concord regiment at Buttrick's request, approached them.

A farmer and cabinetmaker, Hosmer was fiercely committed to resisting the British. A few weeks earlier, at a town meeting, he had leaped to his feet and made a violent, surprisingly eloquent speech in response to a loyalist's sarcastic attack on the Sons of Liberty. Ac-

according to tradition, Hosmer now made another much shorter speech which was to have far larger consequences. He pointed to the smoke rising from the burning gun carriages and the smoldering townhouse roof and asked, "Will you let them burn the town down?"

Challenge at the Bridge

At the North Bridge, the officer in command was Capt. Walter S. Laurie of the 43rd Regiment. He watched the American militia gathering on the hill above him with mounting alarm. Laurie's orders were vague. He knew it was essential to hold the bridge to cover Parsons' line of retreat. But there had been no discussion of a plan to meet an American attack.

The British were understandably nervous about the way the Americans had been moving closer to them. They had forced the light infantry companies of the 4th and 10th regiments to abandon their advanced positions on the two small hills they had just occupied. By now the Americans were within 400 yards of the British, on sloping ground about 50 feet above them.

For an hour the two groups had remained in this position, warily studying each other. Captain Laurie grew more and more nervous and conferred with Lieutenant Sutherland, the volunteer who had served as part of the expedition's advance guard. Laurie wondered if he should send for reinforcements. Sutherland emphatically thought he should, and a lieutenant was sent racing to the center of Concord. In a few minutes he returned with a Captain Lumm on horseback, who told them that reinforcements were on their way.

At this point, the Americans on the hill suddenly formed into a column and began marching toward them. Laurie asked Lumm to tell the reinforcements to come on the double and he galloped back to deliver this message.

Barrett and Buttrick had responded to Lieutenant Hosmer's challenge. They decided to march into Concord to see if the British were in fact burning the town. Barrett could not ignore the

fundamental role of militia, which had a 100-year-old tradition in Massachusetts—to defend home and family from destruction. The British retreat from the two outlying hills made him think that an advance on the bridge might inspire another British retreat which would enable them to march into town without opposition. There, if both sides maintained their determination not to fire first, the confrontation might still end without bloodshed.

At the same time, Barrett half expected trouble. At the head of his column he placed Capt. Isaac Davis and his Acton company of minutemen. Two days a week, the 30-year-old Davis, a gunsmith, had led his men to a firing range behind his house, where they had drilled and practiced their marksmanship. Barrett asked Davis if he was willing to lead the column. “I haven’t a man that’s afraid to go,” he replied.

Colonel Barrett remained on horseback at the top of the hill. As the companies marched past him, he told them again and again not to fire first. There were neither shouts nor cheers from the advancing provincials. The only sound, beside the beat of their marching feet, were the shrill notes of the Acton fifer playing “The White Cockade.” Beside Davis marched Major Buttrick and Lt. Colonel Robinson, who refused Buttrick’s offer to let him take command and served only as his aide.

At first, the British did nothing. They were stunned by the “very military manner” of the American advance. Then Captain Laurie, realizing too late that he and his men were in a very disagreeable position with their backs to the river, ordered his men to retreat across the bridge. His own company, the 43rd light infantry, went first, followed by the 10th and finally by the 4th. Laurie shouted orders for the 4th and 10th companies to prepare for “street firing.” He ordered his own company to move into the fields on the left and right to protect his flanks. He planned, he said, to retreat “by Divisions, to check their progress.”

Divisions was the 18th-century term for platoons or squads. The street firing maneuver was designed to get maximum effect from musketry in a narrow street or road where several companies or regiments were unable to form an extended line. According to the drill, the







front rank fired a single volley and then rapidly retreated behind the rear rank where they loaded their muskets while the next rank fired and retreated to reload in the rear. Theoretically, the defending force could keep this up for a long time and cause horrible carnage among attackers coming at them in the street, or, as was the case at Concord, over a narrow bridge.

But there were two things wrong with this theory. The British troops were not particularly well trained in the maneuver, and the American column, coming at them two abreast, was a relatively small target. It was also a creature with a head (approaching the bridge) and a body and a tail strung out along the road, part of which ran parallel to the river. The British, massed on the other side of the bridge, 12 men to a rank, were a far better target.

At the very last minute it occurred to Laurie that it might be a good idea to tear up the planks of the bridge. Although this meant they were isolating Captain Parsons and his four companies on the wrong side of the river, the excited British started pulling up the planks. Major Buttrick shouted at them to stop and quickened the pace of the column. The bridge wreckers retreated and the Americans came on until they were only a few steps from the span. Several guns were fired on the British side, but they seem to have been warning shots. The bullets dropped into the river. Then the men of the King's Own Regiment fired a full volley. One bullet hit Capt. Isaac Davis in the heart as he raised his gun to fire. He leaped high in the air and died instantly. Near him, one of his privates, Abner Hosmer, dropped with a bullet in his head.

For a split second the Americans could not believe the truth. "Goddamn it," Timothy Brown said to himself, "they are firing ball!"

Major Buttrick whirled and shouted, "Fire, fellow soldiers, for God's sake, fire!"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" went down the column as other officers repeated the order. The Acton men near Buttrick at the head of the column as well as those along the river poured a deadly volley at the regulars. Four of the eight British officers were wounded in this first blast as well as a sergeant and four privates. Two other privates went down, one dead, the other dying.

The British had expected the Americans to break and run at the first volley like the raw troops they were supposed to be. But their 36 bullets had hit only six men, and only three of these were seriously wounded. "They fired too high," one minuteman explained, years later. The Americans, unchecked and undaunted, continued to advance, firing through the smoke at their easy British targets. The regulars broke and ran. As one of their lieutenants described it, "The weight of their fire was such that we was oblig'd to give way then run with the greatest precipitance. . . ." Captain Laurie put it even more disconsolately: "The whole went to the right about in spite of all that could be done to prevent them."

The British fled down the road in mindless panic, even ignoring their own wounded. "Their was 8 or 10 that was wounded and a Running and Hobbling about Lucking [looking] back to see if we was after them," recalled a minuteman.

As they stampeded down the road, the British met belated reinforcements led by none other than fat, perspiring Colonel Smith himself. In the opinion of one disgusted lieutenant, who had witnessed the panic at the bridge, the grenadiers would have arrived in time to make a crucial difference if the ponderous Smith had not chosen to lead them himself, on foot. But Smith was doing the soldierly thing, personally joining the part of his command that was threatened by the enemy, and his roars of rage restored order as they had earlier in the morning on Lexington green.

The Americans, seeing the British reforming, had second thoughts about advancing into town. A good half of them drifted back over the North Bridge and milled around their dead and wounded. Major Buttrick ordered the men within sound of his voice—mostly those of his own regiment—to stay on the east (or Concord) side of the river. But he hastened to take cover behind a stone wall on high ground a few hundred yards from the road. He expected an immediate British counterattack.

During this excitement, one young minuteman noticed a wounded British soldier trying to crawl off the road into a field. The young man, like many other minutemen, carried a hatchet in his belt, a relic of Massachusetts' Indian fighting days. He smashed the British

soldier over the head with this weapon, splitting his skull. Most Americans who saw the deed were horrified by it. "The poor object lived an hour or two before he expired," the Rev. William Emerson wrote later. But there was no time for recriminations now, when they thought the British were about to attack.

Colonel Smith had no intention of attacking the Americans. His one concern was getting Captain Parsons and his four light infantry companies back across North Bridge alive. Making a rapid head count of the provincials on both sides of the river, he decided he would need every man in his command to manage this. He therefore about-faced his five companies and marched back to the center of Concord, where he sent runners dashing through the village, calling off the search, summoning the light infantrymen guarding the South Bridge, creating with all possible speed a compact force ready to march to Parsons' assistance.

Smith and Pitcairn climbed to the top of the ridge above the burial ground where Smith could train his telescope on the road to Barrett's farm. From there he could also watch the Lexington road down which he hoped—possibly he even prayed—to see a full brigade of the army marching toward him—the reinforcements he had requested from General Gage eight hours ago. Smith was not the fool or the total incompetent that some historians have pictured him. When he saw some of Barrett's companies crossing the North Bridge and climbing the slope of the ridge, where they could cut the road to the bridge, he promptly ordered three light infantry companies to get to the top of the ridge ahead of them and maintain control of that vital piece of high ground.

Everywhere Smith looked, he saw trouble. Swarms of minutemen and militiamen were moving across the South Bridge and heading for the Lexington road east of Concord. By now, the Americans had two complete regiments and parts of several others in the vicinity of the town. If every man turned out, they would have outnumbered the British two to one. But only between 50 and 60 per cent of the men on the muster lists turned out on April 19th, so the numbers were only slightly in the Americans' favor.

Smith was, of course, in no position to count the Americans. By

now he may have thought the odds against him were two or three to one. Lieutenant Sutherland had estimated the American column that attacked North Bridge at 1,500 men.

Finally, the tense Smith and Pitcairn saw Parsons and his four companies moving down the road, about a half mile from the North Bridge. If the Americans had been completely committed to fighting a war, which in turn would have meant a policy of destroying the British army as quickly as possible, Colonel Barrett and Major Buttrick would have torn up the planks of North Bridge and isolated Parsons and his men. Or they could have attacked them from both sides as they crossed the bridge. Instead, neither Barrett nor Buttrick fired a shot. Part of the reason was the disordered state of their detachments. A substantial number of minutemen—no one knows exactly how many—had wandered away in search of breakfast during this lull in the contest.

Parsons was unaware that there had been shooting at the bridge. He had marched his men at a leisurely pace, even stopping for breakfast at a local tavern. Their 4-mile hike had been a waste of time. They found nothing at Barrett's farm but a few artillery carriages, which they burned in the road. They missed cannon buried in the fields and ammunition and powder concealed in the attic. Parsons was no doubt brooding about this exercise in futility until he got close to the bridge and saw that Captain Laurie and the three companies had vanished. Next he saw the Americans commanding hills on both sides of the river and ordered his men to double their pace. The four companies crossed the bridge at a steady trot and saw the wounded man who had been battered by the hatchet. He was still breathing. His head was drenched with blood. Naturally associating Americans and Indians, Parsons' men concluded that he had been scalped. By the time they reached the center of Concord, this had been improved to scalped and mutilated, his ears cut off. The word went swiftly through the British ranks, arousing fear—and anger.

This was the least of Colonel Smith's worries. After one last look for reinforcements coming up the road from Boston, he and Pitcairn descended the burial ground hill and joined Parsons and their now-complete command in the center of Concord. Local doc-

tors had been treating the wounded. One of these men, a private, had died, and he was buried without ceremony somewhere in the center of town. Two chaises were commandeered for some of the wounded officers. Several of the more seriously hurt were left behind.

Smith had given up immediate hope of reinforcements. He decided it was imperative to get out of Concord as soon as possible before the Americans seized all the high ground in the vicinity and commanded the road to Boston. With light infantry protecting their flanks as usual, Smith's men marched, expecting the worst. They were under no illusions that they could escape without a fight. But they never thought that, before they reached Lexington, they would be reduced from an army to a mob of fugitives, and threatened with annihilation.

The Americans let the British retreat down the Lexington road for the first mile without firing a shot at them. The terrain, rather than generosity or forbearance, was the reason. On the right the open fields around the scattered houses were easily swept by light infantry flanking parties, while more light infantry moved down the ridge on the left. The ridge ended at Meriam's Corner. Here was where the Massachusetts men chose to fight.

Companies from Reading, Billerica, and other towns came down the old Bedford road to join the men from Concord and Lexington. The house, barns, and other outbuildings of Nathan and Abigail Meriam, which had stood in the meadows at this crossroads for about 112 years, gave them cover. Stone walls dividing the Meriam's fields provided more cover. Clearly, these minutemen and militia had given considerable thought to the best way to fight the British regulars. Using cover, whether a barn or a tree or a stone wall, gave green troops confidence. It also came naturally to them from their Indian fighting past.

The new arrivals were led by men with military experience. Lt. Col. William Thompson of Billerica was a veteran of two campaigns against the French. He placed three companies to the left of the Meriam house on a parallel line about a hundred yards from the road. They were soon joined by five more companies of the same militia regiment, followed by a minuteman regiment under Col. Ebenezer Bridge, who had fought at Crown Point and Ticonderoga in the French and Indian War. A native of Billerica, Bridge had four companies with him—two from Reading, one from Wilmington, and one from his hometown. He dispersed them around the Meriam house. No less

than 12 companies, each averaging between 30 and 40 men, were now ranged along the road on both sides of the Meriam house, ready to fight. Together with the Concord men, they were between 500 and 600 strong.

The road sloped down to a bridge that ran across a small brook at the Meriam farm. Rather than wading the brook, the light infantry joined the grenadiers to cross the bridge. A minister with one of the Reading companies, the Rev. Edmund Foster, described them coming "down the hill with very slow but steady step, without music or a word being spoken that could be heard. Silence on both sides."

According to Foster, the Americans waited for the British to fire first. He said that the light infantrymen fired a volley at his company the moment they crossed the bridge. "They overshot; and no one, to my knowledge, was injured by the fire. The fire was immediately returned by the Americans and two British soldiers fell dead at a little distance from each other in the road near the bridge."

Ensign Jeremy Lister of the 10th Regiment's light infantry said that the Americans fired on them steadily as they descended the hill into the road, "but at so great a distance it was without effect." After the British volleyed, "it then became a general firing upon us from all quarters, from behind hedges and walls." In this first exchange, a bullet smashed Lister's right elbow.

Another British officer later said with evident disgust that the regulars "threw away" most of their fire "for want of that coolness and steadiness which distinguishes troops who have been inured to service." Again we see the paradoxical fact, little noticed by many historians: the British troops were as green as the Americans. Mournfully, the same officer noted that the redcoats' bad aim "gave the rebels more confidence as they soon found that . . . they suffered but little" from the British fire. They moved closer to the road and returned it with ferocity. By the time Concord minuteman Amos Barrett reached the little bridge, he saw that "a grait many Lay dead and the road was bloody."

The half-mile-long British column moved on at the fastest possible pace, flanking parties of light infantrymen once more swirling off the road to keep the Americans out of musket range. On the

Massachusetts side, officers led their men in a race through the fields and woods to new positions where they hoped to get another shot at the column. (The narrow road down which the British marched has no resemblance to the modern highway with its few curves and easy grades.) Again and again the road dropped into small ravines, giving the Americans high ground from which to fire on the column.

At two points the road bent north, and at one of these places known as Hardy's Hill, the Americans had the advantage of great trees on the south (right) and high bushes on the north (left) sides of the road. Waiting in the woods on the right were five companies of minutemen—two from Framingham and three from Sudbury, the largest town in Middlesex County. They were commanded by Lt. Col. Thomas Nixon, another veteran of the French wars, and almost all the company commanders were also veterans, including Nixon's older brother John. Nixon had between 200 and 300 men with him, and they opened a ferocious fire on the British column. Again grenadiers and light infantrymen dropped groaning or staggered out of the formation to bleed on the side of the road. The flankers were ordered to dislodge the Americans, but the woods were almost impassible and Reverend Foster noted grimly, "They only became better marks to be shot at." They soon joined the column on the road.

At the head of the column, Smith and Pitcairn saw more trouble beyond Hardy's Hill. The road descended that rise, crossed Elm Brook, and climbed another hill where it made two sharp turns, first to the left, then to the right. Woods crowded the road on the right side, and on the left side were open fields crisscrossed by stone walls. More than 1,500 men were hotly pursuing the British along the left side of the road, while the Nixon brothers and their men were scrambling through the woods to get at them from the right. Flanking parties in the open fields did their best to hold off the men on the left, catching a number by surprise. Capt. Jonathan Wilson, of the Bedford company, and several of his men were trapped behind a barn and wiped out by a bayonet charge. But these men were only a diversion (although they did not realize this) for an ambush that almost stopped the British column permanently.

Maj. Loammi Baldwin and 197 men from Woburn were crouched







behind stone walls and rocks close to the road at the corner where it turned to the right, back toward Lexington. Baldwin, only 30 years old, had been a leader in the old loyal militia. He was a born soldier and would soon be a colonel in George Washington's army. He had marched from Woburn at dawn with his three companies and arrived at Lexington just after the regulars departed. He and his men had seen the carnage on the green and were particularly enraged to discover their dead fellow townsman, Asahel Porter. The Woburn men were hungry for revenge, and they get it at this corner, part of the area later christened "the Bloody Angle."

Without any warning, they poured a point-blank volley into the two leading units in the British column, the 10th and 5th light infantry companies. Eight soldiers died in this first blast, another 23, including three officers, were wounded. For a moment the British column almost reeled to a halt. But the officers who were still on their feet managed to get enough men off the road into the fields on the left and drove back most of the Woburn men, killing one and wounding three. On the right, some of Baldwin's more determined soldiers were concealed in the woods and got as many as ten shots into the British column before they quit. It took almost a half hour to clear the road. The delay revealed to the British for the first time the possibility of annihilation. The men from Meriam's Corner swarmed around the rear and along the left flank of the column, while Colonel Nixon's men blasted the right rear and right center companies. The number of the Americans and the ferocity of their fire began to terrify the British. "It seemed as if men came down from the clouds," one soldier said.

In about 15 more minutes of rapid marching—the front of the column moving at a trot—the British crossed a small brook and mounted another hill. Snipers pegged shots at the head of the column from nearby fields. But most of the Americans who had fought at the Bloody Angle fell behind because they too had to use the road to avoid the numerous swamps and brooks in the vicinity. For a moment, Smith and Pitcairn began to hope that the worst was over. But on the hill beyond the brook waited Captain Parker and his Lexington militia company. No men in Massachusetts were more eager for revenge.

Parker had deliberately chosen this hill which was just inside the Lexington town line. He told each man to clear an opening in the brush, and wait for his order to fire. The first British units to cross the bridge over the brook were led by Smith on horseback. Behind him were the 10th and 5th Light Infantry companies, their ranks crowded with staggering men wounded at the Bloody Angle. Parker made sure every man in his company had a direct shot at the column and then shouted, "Fire!"

Smith toppled from his horse, clutching his thigh. Captain Parsons was wounded in the arm, and at least a dozen other soldiers went down in this new ambush. Major Pitcairn sent grenadiers and light infantry to attack the Lexington men on both flanks. After some savage fighting, Parker's men scattered into the woods. Behind them they left the dead body of Jedediah Munroe, who had been wounded on Lexington green, but had stayed in the fight. On the road, the column had halted again, and the Americans pursuing from the Bloody Angle were starting to wreck havoc on the rear and center once more.

Pitcairn saw the situation was close to collapse. Wounded men were abandoning their companies and fleeing toward the front of the column, whimpering hysterically. Three and four wounded men were clinging to a single horse, letting the weary animal drag them along. Other wounded were dropping out to sit beside the road in weary surrender. Up ahead Pitcairn saw a small hill called The Bluff. He ordered his marines, the one group of men in the column over whom he was sure he had control, to seize this high ground, while he rode down the column urging everyone to stay in their ranks and get around The Bluff to safety. The battered redcoats' morale lifted slightly, and they staggered forward once more. The marines on The Bluff managed to hold off the pursuing Americans for several minutes, but they took heavy casualties, losing their captain and their lieutenant.

Pitcairn rode to the head of the column, replacing Smith, who was limping along in the ranks with his men. Within minutes the marine major and the lead companies met another blast of musketry from fresh American minutemen lying in ambush on Fiske Hill, the next rise in the road. Pitcairn's horse threw him and raced across the

fields to be captured by the provincials.

The woods on Fiske Hill came down to the very edge of the road and every tree seemed to conceal an American musket. Other guns blazed from houses and barns near the road. The exhausted light infantrymen were ordered to clear the flanks once more. They tried at the cost of another 5 dead and still more wounded.

In close-quarter fighting around the Ebenezer Fiske house, James Hayward of Isaac Davis' Acton company came face to face with a light infantryman who threw up his musket and shouted, "You are a dead man."

"So are you," replied Hayward.

Both men fired and both went down, the light infantryman dead on the spot, Hayward mortally wounded.

Another American, Noah Eaton of Framingham, was more clever. He found a flanker reloading his gun. "Surrender or die," he said, levelling his musket at him. The British infantryman surrendered and handed over his musket, never realizing that Eaton's gun was empty.

As the redcoats stumbled up Concord Hill, the last rise between them and Lexington, one of the British officers recalled, "we began to run rather than retreat in order. . . . We attempted to stop the men and form them two deep, but to no purpose. The confusion increased rather than lessened." Finally, desperate officers raced to the front of the column and "presented their bayonets and told the men if they advanced they should die."

The men began to reform their ranks "with amazing bravery," this same officer said. But there was little or no attempt to return the American fire. The regulars' ammunition was nearly gone, and the flankers were too exhausted to do more than stagger along the edge of the road. Suddenly the men in the front ranks began to cheer. The astonished officers must have thought they had gone berserk. Some of the cheerers pointed wildly toward Boston. The officers turned, and saw along the hill on the east side of the Lexington common a line of redcoated regiments—a full brigade of reinforcements. Officers and men alike broke into a run, abandoning all pretense of military formation. Across Lexington green they stumbled, dragging their wounded. On the hill two cannon boomed and the pursuing minutemen and militia scattered in panicky retreat.

Smith's men reeled up the hill and fell to the ground beneath the trees around the Munroe Tavern, totally exhausted, whimpering for water, food, and surgeons for the wounded. Brig. Gen. Hugh, Lord Percy looked with amazement on these shattered remnants of General Gage's elite troops. He summed up their condition in a letter he wrote a few days later. "I had the happiness of saving them from inevitable destruction."

“A New and More Terrific Scene”

What took these British reinforcements so long to rescue Smith and his outnumbered expedition? Neither Gage nor Smith had any illusions about the possibility of trouble in the countryside. They had discussed reinforcements and before Gage went to bed on the night of April 18th, he had written orders for the 1st Brigade, commanded by Lord Percy, to be ready to march at 4 a.m. on the 19th. What happened to this order was described in some detail by a vexed British officer in Boston a few weeks later:

These orders the evening before were carried to the brigade major's; he was not at home; the orders were left; no inquiry was made after him; he came home late; his servant forgot to tell him there was a letter on his table; four o'clock came; no brigade appeared; at five o'clock an express from Smith desiring a reinforcement produced an inquiry; . . . at six o'clock part of the brigade got on the parade; there they waited expecting the marines; at seven no marines appearing another inquiry commenced; they said they had received no orders; it was asserted they had; in the altercation it came out that the order had been addressed to Major Pitcairn who commanded and was left at his quarters, though the gentleman concerned in the business ought to have recollected that Pitcairn had been dispatched the evening before with the grenadiers and light infantry under Lieut. Col. Smith. This double mistake lost us from four till nine o'clock.

It was not an easy matter to collect all the officers of a 1,000-man brigade when they were living in private houses scattered throughout Boston. The regiments composing the brigade were also scattered, some living in tents on the Common and others on Mount Whoredom, north of Beacon Street. When the brigade finally got under way, they had to take the long route to Lexington, over Boston Neck through Cambridge. They marched

past silent, apparently empty houses with doors locked and windows shuttered. At the bridge over the Charles, just south of Harvard College, they stopped, momentarily nonplused to find the planks removed. But the thrifty Yankees had not destroyed them. They had only piled them on the other side of the river. Percy's men crossed on the stringers, relaid the planks, and the brigade resumed its march.

In Menotomy (present day Arlington) Percy met Lt. Edmund Gould of the King's Own Regiment riding in a Concord chaise containing another wounded lieutenant. Numerous provincials waiting in ambush along the road had permitted these two bleeding men to pass unmolested. Gould told Percy that Smith was in serious trouble. Percy ordered an aide, Lieutenant Rooke, to return to Boston and warn General Gage that still more help might be needed before the day was over.

As the brigade reached the Lexington town line, the sounds of musketry drifted across the hills to them on the chill April wind. Percy had three regiments with him—the 4th (King's Own), the 47th (Lancashire), and 23rd (Royal Welsh Fusiliers)—plus the 400-man marine battalion, a total of about 1,000 men. The son of the powerful Duke of Northumberland, Percy was a veteran of fighting in Europe during the Seven Years' War. Ironically, his father sympathized with the Americans and had voted against the Stamp Act in the House of Lords. But this did not mean Percy sympathized with the "exeremely violent & wrongheaded" people of Massachusetts. He was still contemptuous of the fighting potential of the Americans, and when he marched from Boston he had rather abruptly told the colonel in command of the Royal Artillery that he would have no need for extra ammunition beyond the 24 rounds his two 6-pounder field pieces carried in their sideboxes.

As soon as he heard the firing, Percy ordered his men to seize the hills east of Lexington green. In this position they were spotted by Smith's disintegrating light infantrymen and grenadiers. While Smith's men rested, Percy held a conference with his officers in Munroe's Tavern. Around him groaning wounded were being treated by army surgeons. Outside he could hear the popping sounds of muskets as militiamen crept close to his lines and began skirmishing. The

British sent their best shots into the woods to return the fire “lying on their bellies like [the] rebels.”

To improve his security and warn the militiamen that he meant business, Percy ordered his men to burn down three nearby houses and knock over a number of stone walls from which the provincials might harass them. Percy gave these orders personally, riding to examine all sides of his battle line. On both flanks his officers reported huge numbers of Americans bypassing them to take positions along the road between them and Boston.

At the Charles River bridge Percy had left behind two supply wagons loaded with additional ammunition. They had never caught up with him and he now had to conclude they were lost. In fact, they were already captured in Menotomy by a group of old men who had been left to guard the town by local minutemen when they marched for Concord. This meant that Percy's men had only 36 rounds in their pouches and it was a long 11 miles to Boston. Caution would seem to have dictated an immediate departure. But Percy waited an additional half hour—till 3:30—to give Smith's depleted men more rest. They were his biggest worry. After looting the Munroe Tavern of everything edible and drinkable, they stretched on the grass, in a stupor of exhaustion and defeat.

Ensign Jeremy Lister had had the bullet in his arm extracted in the Munroe Tavern, “the ball having gone through the Bone and Lodg'd in the skin.” He was weak from loss of blood and lack of food, “having not had a Morcel since the day before.” He asked a soldier who was eating some “Bisquet and Beef” to give him some. “He generously comply'd and gave me half what he had which was about a Mouth full of each.” Noticing Colonel Smith borrowing a horse from a marine officer, Lister asked him for it, explaining he was too weak to march. Smith gave him the horse and transferred his own bulk to a chaise.

While the British regrouped, the Americans were trying to do the same thing. They finally had a general—the only one who reached the field on April 19th. He was a portly, bald-headed farmer named William Heath. With him was a more important, more magnetic figure, Dr. Joseph Warren, author of the Suffolk Resolves, and

Samuel Adams' right hand in Boston. Handsome and passionate, Warren had left the port city the moment he heard about the firing in Lexington. Crossing to Charlestown by ferry, he told a friend, "They have begun it—that either party can do; and we'll end it,—that only one can do."

After a brief meeting of the province's Committee of Safety at Menotomy, in which they ordered express riders to carry the word of the fighting throughout New England, Warren and Heath rode around Percy's column through Watertown to Lexington. At Watertown, Heath ordered some militia who had not yet joined the battle to march as rapidly as possible to Cambridge and dismantle the Charles River bridge. This time they were to make sure the planks were well hidden.

At Lexington, Heath found the elements of an army—four complete regiments plus four others at about half strength. His problem was how to organize them into an effective fighting force. Heath did not have much military experience but he had read a great deal about tactics and strategy, which he demonstrated in a number of newspaper essays signed "A Military Countryman." He was well adapted to the task confronting him—directing, in only the loosest sense of that word, a continuing attack on the British retreat. He did not have any desire to form his men into columns and charge the British position. Instead, he simply advised captains and regimental commanders on where to position their men, counseling them on when to retreat and how to attack.

Although the Americans did not organize themselves into a unified army, they used Percy's pause to regroup into companies and regiments. They were heartened by the arrival of Heath and Warren, who confirmed that war had begun and they should do everything in their power to destroy the British column before it got to Boston. Warren was particularly effective, reiterating his grim "They have begun it—we will end it," and making brief speeches to various units to "keep up a brave heart."

Warren's angry determination and inspiring rhetoric, and Heath's military authority, were good antidotes to the British cannon fire. Even when one ball crashed through the Lexington meeting house,

scattering a crowd of minutemen who were gathering on the green and almost decapitating Loammi Baldwin and a British prisoner he was escorting, American determination to make the rest of the British march to Boston uncomfortable only increased—as did their numbers. From several towns wagons with additional ammunition arrived on the Lexington green or in its vicinity, and the minutemen replenished their almost empty cartridge boxes. The men of Malden found boys with saddlebags full of ammunition waiting for them.

Ordering some companies and regiments to “work upon the flank of the enemy,” Heath sent others racing ahead of the British to occupy the numerous empty houses along the road, particularly in the town of Menotomy. All things considered, Heath was convinced that “a new and more terrific scene” was about to open.

With the same cool competence that he had displayed in organizing the position that rescued Smith's grenadiers and light infantrymen, Lord Percy planned his retreat. At the head of the column, where he did not expect much trouble, he placed Colonel Smith, now riding in a chaise because of his leg wound, and his battered companies. Behind them marched Pitcairn and his 400 marines. The rear guard would be handled by the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. But the really important task was assigned to companies of the 4th and 47th Regiments. Five companies of the King's Own Regiment were ordered to guard the right flank, moving along the slopes of a rough 3-mile ridge that ran from Lexington to present-day Arlington Heights. The left flank was assigned to the 47th Regiment. Three companies were thought to be sufficient for the time being because a small stream, Mill Brook, would, Lord Percy reasoned, discourage large numbers of Americans from approaching too closely. The artillery was ordered to march just ahead of the Fusiliers in the column so that they could assist the rear guard.

By this time the British were as eager as the Americans to use every natural defense available. Lt. Frederick McKenzie of the Fusiliers tells the story in his journal: "We . . . lined the Walls and other Cover in our front with some Marksmen." They then retired by companies to high ground "a Small distance in the rear" where they waited for a half hour while the rest of the column got on the road. The moment the Fusiliers withdrew the marksmen and joined the line of march, the Americans surged forward and muskets roared on the right, left, and rear. The 218 Welsh Fusiliers were soon fighting for their lives. "They [the Americans]

pressed very much upon our rear guard,” Lord Percy later said. This was an understatement to the embattled Fusiliers.

“We were fired on from all quarters,” McKenzie wrote, “but particularly from the houses on the roadside and the Adjacent Stone walls.” More than a few Americans charged to within several yards of the Fusiliers, shouting, “King Hancock forever,” before firing.

The Americans also revealed a secret weapon—men on horseback. Several minutemen regiments had organized troops of cavalry. A number of foot soldiers voluntarily brought horses, perhaps like the men of Malden, to transport extra ammunition. At least a dozen, perhaps two dozen of these riders now got into the fight, galloping between the flanking parties and the column, leaping off to take a shot at the massed ranks in the road, and riding away while bullets whistled around them. Amos Wyman of Woburn, riding a huge white horse that made him a natural target, did this repeatedly. Both he and his horse escaped unscathed. Others were not so fortunate. At least three men had horses shot dead, and one of these mounted minutemen, William Polly of Medford, was fatally wounded.

Dr. Warren and General Heath were in the thick of this attack on the rear, which continued for about 2½ miles to Pierce’s Hill (Arlington Heights). Warren exposed himself recklessly to encourage the men. A British bullet knocked a pin out of his hair, but he continued to be “the most active man on the field.”

The road from Pierce’s Hill sloped down to the village of Menotomy. It was a crossroads town and the logical place for minutemen and militia marching from the eastern part of Middlesex County and the southern part of Essex County to gather. They had been pouring into the village for hours. In addition to Heath’s men, no less than 34 companies, all fresh men with full ammunition pouches, were waiting for Percy in the mile-long stretch of houses between the bottom of Pierce’s Hill, called the Foot of the Rocks, and Spy Pond. They had taken up positions in and around the deserted houses and barns and behind the stone walls that divided the nearby pastures.

Typical of these new arrivals was the minuteman company from Danvers commanded by husky 26-year-old Lt. Gideon Foster. They had reached Menotomy in 4 hours—half the time it would ordinary

take men marching 16 miles. Lieutenant Foster positioned his men along a stone wall that flanked a hillside orchard. Nearby were companies of minutemen from Lynn, Needham, and Dedham. Other members of Foster's company concealed themselves behind a stone wall that ran around the house of Jason Russell. They seized bundles of shingles lying in the yard and made them into a breastwork.

Fifty-eight-year-old Jason Russell joined them, determined to defend his well-kept, grey-clapboard house. A friend, Ammi Cutter, one of the over-aged fighters who had helped capture the British supply wagons earlier in the day (and had since captured the wounded Lieutenant Gould in his chaise), tried to talk him out of it. Russell shook his head. "A man's home is his castle," he said. Cutter stayed with him, still trying to talk him into leaving.

Russell Foster's men, and almost every other man waiting for the British at Menotomy, had their eyes on the Lexington road. None of them had fought the British earlier in the day. They were not aware that the British were thoroughly prepared for their Indian-style tactics and had between 100 and 150 men sweeping the flat open fields on both sides of the road. One veteran of the French and Indian War did warn Lieutenant Foster that there might be flanking parties. But he disregarded him. He and his men wanted to be close enough to get a decent shot at the retreating column.

The British were also ready for the Americans hiding in deserted houses. In the first mile of their march, Lieutenant McKenzie noted that the American fire came "particularly from the houses on the roadside." As they entered Menotomy and muskets belched death from the first houses, Lord Percy grimly gave Colonel Smith's tired men orders to split into squads and attack every building with the bayonet. "The soldiers were . . . enraged at suffering from an unseen Enemy," McKenzie wrote. Fury on both sides thus guaranteed that these encounters would be savage.

Jason Russell and the Danvers men commanded by Lieutenant Foster were among the first to learn this grim truth. The flanking parties of the 4th Regiment appeared between the Danvers men and the road, which was now crowded with British troops. Those who did not die behind their walls ran for the two-story Russell house, joined

by men from Lynn and Needham. Jason Russell, trying to defend his doorway, was killed instantly by two bullets. Twenty-one-year-old Perley Putnam of Danvers was also dropped by a bullet just outside the house. The aged Ammi Cutter dove behind a pile of logs and miraculously escaped a hail of lead.

The wildest fighting took place inside the Russell house. Daniel Townsend and Timothy Monroe were trapped on the first floor. "Townsend," said Monroe, "leaped through the end window, carrying sash and all with him." Flankers waiting in the yard shot him dead. Monroe followed him. A musket ball tore into his leg. He staggered to his feet and fled while bullets hummed all around him from both the flankers and men in the column. Later he counted 32 holes in his hat and clothes.

Others were not so lucky. Eleven men, including seven from Danvers, were killed in the Russell house in brutal hand-to-hand fighting. The struggle raged from the cellar to the attic, with the odds heavily in favor of the British, trained in the use of the bayonet. Lieutenant Foster claimed that three or four of his men surrendered and were "butchered with savage barbarity." He was supported by Dennison Wallis who said that he surrendered in the yard outside the house and then bolted for freedom when he realized he was about to be massacred. He was hit by several bullets but survived.

In most houses militiamen received no quarter. "All that we found in the houses were put to death," Lieutenant Barker said. Lieutenant McKenzie confirmed this practice.

On the other side of the road the British were encountering a graphic example of American determination in the person of 80-year-old Samuel Whittemore. A former cavalry officer, Whittemore had equipped himself with two pistols, a saber, and a musket, and crouched behind a stone wall near Cooper's Tavern at the junction of the road to Medford. Flankers from the 47th Regiment collided with him. Whittemore killed one with his musket and emptied both his pistols at the rest, killing or wounding at least one more soldier before he was shot in the face. Militiamen around him fled and the enraged British bayoneted Whittemore 13 times. Incredibly, he survived to live another 18 years.

Inside Cooper's Tavern, while the fighting raged around them, sat Jason Winship and Jabez Wyman. Brothers-in-law, they were celebrating the birth of Winship's first son. Innkeeper Benjamin Cooper took his wife Rachel and headed for the tavern's cellar as the thunder of musketry came down the road toward them. Wyman and Winship were drinking flip, a powerful combination of rum, eggs, and spices. Wyman revealed how much he had drunk by serenely telling Winship, "Let us finish the mug, they won't come yet." Within minutes the British fired several volleys of musketry into the tavern, broke down the doors, and killed Wyman and Winship with their bayonets. Benjamin Cooper later called these two toppers "aged gentlemen." They were both in their forties. More candid witnesses admitted privately that they were too drunk to run and "died like fools."

In the house of Deacon Joseph Adams a curious personal drama took place. Adams had stayed home to protect his wife who had recently had a baby. When the British burst into the house he raced out the back door and escaped a blast of musketry to hide under the hay in a nearby barn. The British found Mrs. Adams in bed, holding her new baby flanked by two daughters, aged 20 and 14. Nine-year-old Joel Adams peeped out from under the bed. "Why don't you come out here?" asked one of the soldiers.

"You'll kill me if I do," the boy replied.

"No, we won't," the soldier said.

The boy came out and watched the soldiers prowl through the house, stealing odds and ends of silver and jewelry.

When the soldiers discovered the church's communion silver and began stuffing it in their haversacks, young Joel warned them that his father would "lick them" if they took it. They took it anyway, then told the family to get out of the house, broke up some chairs in the center of the parlor, and set the wood pile ablaze. The moment they left, young Joel put out the flames with a pot of his father's home-brewed beer.

In most other houses the fighting continued to be savage, with no quarter given or asked. Along with trying to burn many houses, the regulars started to loot on a wide scale. More than one British soldier died because he lingered behind to see what else he could

steal and was caught by minutemen who surrounded the house as the British moved on. Both sides became more and more exasperated and infuriated—the British because, in Lieutenant McKenzie's words, they "had very few opportunities of getting good shots at the rebels"; the Americans by the sight of their own dead and the wrecking and plundering that British soldiers did to many houses.

A number of British officers were distressed by the thievery and mentioned it with regret in their letters and diaries. Lieutenant Barker of the 10th Regiment called the plundering "shamefull." He said some of the soldiers "hardly thought of anything else; what was worse they were encouraged by some Officers." Clearly, some British saw looting as an act of revenge.

At the same time, men on both sides exhibited remarkable courage. Lord Percy saw Americans advance "within ten yds to fire at me & other officers, tho' they were morally certain of being put to death themselves in an instant." One bullet clipped a button off Percy's coat. But he escaped the hundreds of bullets fired at him without a scratch.

Near the Foot of the Rocks, Dr. Warren and General Heath urged the men of Concord, Lexington, and neighboring towns forward to continue a fierce attack on the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. From front to rear of the mile-long British column, muskets roared. Menotomy was engulfed by a huge melee, one of the biggest battles of the Revolution, involving perhaps 5,500 men. It was a brawl that spilled out of the road into the fields and orchards and barns as well as houses. Shouts of American defiance mingled with the enraged bellows of charging British flankers. Sheets of bullets hurtled in all directions as the companies in the road fired full volleys at dodging, twisting militiamen. The whine of single Yankee shots mingled with this massed thunder.

The colonel of the Fusiliers staggered as a bullet ripped into his thigh. His frantic men yelled for more help from the flankers. They were running out of ammunition. More than 30 of them were dead or wounded. On the flanks of the Fusiliers, the men of the Royal Artillery worked their guns in steady support. They saved their limited supply of ammunition for large concentrations of militiamen,

again and again forcing them to break into small groups. If a whole company or a regiment could have gotten close enough to the British column to deliver a massed volley, the carnage and ensuing panic might have been devastating.

Toward the center of the column, Ensign Lister got off the horse he had borrowed from Colonel Smith because “the Balls whistled so smartly about my Ears.” He began using the horse as a breastwork. “As the balls came thicker from one side or the other so I went from one side of the Horse to the other.” Then a horse near him, which had a wounded man on his back and three hanging on his sides, was shot dead. The wounded men begged Lister for his horse and he gave it to them. Nearby, Lieutenant Hull, badly wounded at Concord Bridge, was dying in his chaise. He was hit two more times in the lead-filled main street of Menotomy.

Massachusetts also learned the grim realities of war in the battle of Menotomy. More than half the minutemen and militia who died on April 19th fell in and around the once-peaceful houses and barns. The air was thick with the acrid smell of gunpowder. Men’s faces and hands were black with it. Wounded men cried out in agony. Everywhere houses displayed smashed windows, wrecked doors, bullet-riddled walls. The trim, quiet village through which Colonel Smith and his column had marched in the pre-dawn darkness had become a charnel house.

As the rear of his column emerged from Menotomy, Lord Percy ordered the Royal Marines to replace the ammunition-short Welsh Fusiliers as the rear guard. Major Pitcairn and his men bore the brunt of the American attack for the rest of the day. Their casualties—more than 50 dead and wounded—make it clear that Dr. Warren and General Heath still maintained ferocious pressure on the rear of the British column.

But the going became much easier for Percy’s men up front. The flanking parties kept the minutemen at bay, forcing them to fire from such a distance that one American officer called it “useless and trifling.” Even at 50 yards, the crude muskets and the misshapen bullets they fired were extremely inaccurate. One historical statistician has estimated that only one out of 300 shots fired by the minutemen

and militia on April 19th hit a British soldier.

Ahead of Lord Percy, as the British entered Cambridge, General Heath made a final attempt to trap the column. At a crossroads called Watson's Corner, Maj. Isaac Gardner of Brookline headed a squad of men in ambush around a blacksmith's shop near the road. It was their first fighting of the day, and like the men at Menotomy they had not foreseen the British flankers. They were trapped by a bayonet charge from the rear. Gardner and two members of the Cambridge militia were killed. A mentally retarded boy, William Marcy, who had perched on a nearby fence to watch the fight, also received a bullet through the head.

Beyond Watson's Corner, Percy saw the rest of Gardner's regiment blocking the road. These men were hoping to force the British to turn right on to present-day Massachusetts Avenue and return to Boston the way they had come out—across the Charles River. As General Heath had ordered, the Watertown militia had torn up the planks of the bridge and made a barricade of them on the Brighton side. Heath hoped to pin the British against the unfordable Charles.

But Lord Percy was thinking harder than General Heath, and he had already concluded that with all of Massachusetts in an obvious state of insurrection, the bridge would almost certainly be dismantled again. Moreover, he correctly read the other reason why the Americans were blocking the road ahead of him. It led to the Charlestown peninsula, across the harbor from Boston, on a route that was 5 miles shorter than the march back through Roxbury. Once on the peninsula, Percy would have the benefit of high open ground on Bunker Hill and reinforcements and fresh ammunition could be carried across the harbor to him with impunity.

Briskly, Lord Percy ordered his two cannon to the head of the column and opened fire. The American formation dissolved and fled to the cover of stone walls and trees. Percy resumed his march, letting his flanking parties deal with the Americans as they attacked “in the same straggling manner the rest had done before.”

Ahead loomed Prospect Hill, one of the highest points around Boston. Several companies of minutemen and militia were on the crest ready to swarm down on the British in the road, which swung

to the right around the base of the hill. Again Percy brought his cannon into play and sent the 47th Regiment up the hill in open formation. The Americans fired a few rounds and hastily retreated—except for 65-year-old James Miller, whose house was on the slope of the hill. Miller said he was “too old to run,” and he stood his ground, firing steadily at the oncoming British until he was cut down by a dozen bullets.

By now it was about 7 o'clock. Evening shadows stretched across the countryside. Flanking parties continued to search—and loot—every house along the road. They left at least one soldier lying dead across a chest he had just opened, shot in the back by a militiaman who crept to the window, fired, and raced away. By now, noted Lieutenant Barker of the 10th Regiment, the men were “so wild and irregular that there was no keeping them in any order.”

But Barker was only talking about the flanking parties. The rest of the British column was in excellent order, moving irresistibly down the Charlestown road (present-day Somerville Avenue and Washington Street) toward Bunker Hill. Lord Percy had won his battle of wits and strength with General Heath. Americans no longer had any hope of annihilating the British column. Fighting still raged along the flanks of the marine rear guard, but there was now no significant body of Americans between the British and safety.

On Winter Hill, behind Prospect Hill about a thousand yards from the road, fresh Americans appeared in the gathering dusk—a regiment from Salem led by another well-read student of military tactics, Col. Timothy Pickering. After the battle, General Heath wrote wistfully that had “these arrived a few minutes sooner, the left flank of the British must have been greatly exposed, and suffered considerably; perhaps their retreat would have been cut off.” There was no doubt that Pickering’s well-drilled soldiers would have given the British a rough time. But there were only 300 of them, and it is hard to believe they would have been able to stop Percy’s column any better than Major Gardner’s regiment in the fight near Watson’s Corner.

Muskets still flared in the dusk around the marine rear guard as the head of Percy’s column crossed the narrow neck of the Charles-

town peninsula and skirted the 300 houses of the village, the oldest settlement in the Bay Colony. In this last burst of gunfire, the British saw a black man hit by one of their bullets, and dragged to safety by white minutemen fighting with him. It was probably Prince Estabrook, who, like many other members of the Lexington company, was still in the fight. He recovered from his wound and served in the American army throughout the war.

Traveling across the neck in the other direction was a stream of frightened civilians from Charlestown, certain that the British were going to take revenge on them for their suffering along the road from Lexington. At the neck, not far from the landing of the ferry to Boston, 14-year-old Edward Barber, the son of a sea captain, ran to the window of his house to watch the regulars pass. By this time, anyone moving inside a house was considered a potential sniper by the British. A regular levelled his musket and killed the boy with a single shot. His twelve brothers and sisters ran screaming into the streets and the panic in Charlestown multiplied.

One or two of the town's selectmen hurried to Lord Percy, on his horse beside the column as they ascended Bunker Hill, and swore that no one in Charlestown had any intention of fighting the British. Earlier in the day, Gage had sent a message from Boston warning the selectmen that if anyone in Charlestown was seen with a gun in his hand, there would be "disagreeable consequences." Just off the ferry landing loomed H.M.S. *Somerset* with 68 cannon in two menacing tiers. This threat had dissipated Charlestown's martial spirit early in the day.

Lord Percy accepted the selectmen's offer of a truce. He told them to get everyone off the streets and produce some food and drink for his tired soldiers.

On the other side of Charlestown Neck, General Heath was sending orders "to halt and give over the pursuit, as any further attempt upon the enemy . . . would have been futile." The marines had formed a line of battle across the neck. Aboard *Somerset* the sailors had their guns primed and ready to support their brothers in arms with massive barrages. Four or five American muskets barked in the darkness. Silence fell. The long day was over.

Beyond the two armies, across the 16-mile-long battlefield, lay a trail of dead, dying, and wounded men, grieving parents, wives, brothers, sisters. In Acton, Capt. Isaac Davis' wife sat beside his corpse, dazedly remembering how he had turned to her as he marched his men from the house and said, "Take care of the children." In Cambridge, the weeping son of John Hicks found his father lying beside Maj. Isaac Gardner at Watson's Corner. The 50-year-old Hicks had been a member of the Boston Tea Party. On Bunker Hill, the battered British were mustering their companies. Ensign Lister of the 10th Regiment, in agonizing pain from his shattered elbow, heard a report from a sergeant who told him "he had but eleven men and could not find any other officer of the company."

General Gage immediately began shipping troops of the 2nd and 3rd brigades across the harbor to Charlestown. The boats returned with the wounded men and the weary light infantrymen and grenadiers. The last to be replaced were the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the Royal Marines. It was after midnight before they landed at the north end of Boston and marched to their barracks.

The last man to return safely from the expedition was Lieutenant Rooke, the aide-de-camp Percy had sent back to Boston to warn Gage that the situation was serious. Rooke had encountered hundreds of minutemen on the road and fled into the woods, no doubt dodging a fair number of bullets in the process, and abandoning his horse. He did not get back to Boston until 4 a.m.

The British had had 73 men killed and 174 wounded. Another 26 were missing, some of them wounded left behind along the road, a few desert-

ers, or surrendered captives. Massachusetts' losses are more difficult to compute. There was no organized system of casualty reports. We are fairly certain that 49 were killed, but the semi-official estimate of only 41 wounded is suspicious. The ratio of killed to wounded is usually 1 to 3 in land battles. Many of the wounded may have gone home and never reported their injuries.

As the battle fury died away, men on both sides began assessing the experience. Lieutenant Barker wrote in his diary: "Thus ended this expedition, which from beginning to end was as ill-plan'd and ill-executed as it was possible to be." Capt. William Glanville Evelyn of the King's Own Regiment remained convinced that the "Yankey scoundrels" were still "the most absolute cowards on the face of the earth." He attributed the valor they had displayed on April 19th to "such a degree of enthusiasm and madness that they are easily persuaded the Lord is to assist them in whatever they undertake, and that they must be invincible."

Another officer, writing some time later, portrayed the British as "valiant soldiers *inhumanly* and *wantonly* butchered [while] peaceably marching to and from Concord." The chagrined Colonel Smith could only complain that, "Notwithstanding the enemy's numbers, they did not make one gallant attempt during so long an action."

But Lord Percy, the man who had rescued the British from destruction, took a more balanced view of Massachusetts' tactics. It was true that the minutemen and militia had attacked in a "very scattered, irregular manner," but Percy noted they did so with "perseverance & resolution, nor did they ever dare to form into any regular body. Indeed they knew too well what was proper, to do so." Grimly, Percy concluded, "Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob will find himself much mistaken. They have men amongst them who know very well what they are about." He was now convinced that "the rebels . . . are determined to go thro with it, nor will the insurrection here turn out so despicable as it is perhaps imagined at home."

Percy recognized, with the eye of an intelligent soldier, one of the least understood realities of April 19th. The Americans who responded to the British challenge were not a mass of disorganized individuals; they were a well-supplied rudimentary army which had

been organizing and training for 6 months. They were in a state of battle readiness, much better prepared to fight than the British soldiers who marched out of Boston. A heavy proportion of the American officers were veterans who knew how to lead men into battle. Their training and the knowledge that they outnumbered the British five to one (even counting all the men Gage had in Boston) added to the confidence with which they responded to the alarm when the fighting began. In short, April 19th was a victory of preparedness. It was not the product of spontaneous enthusiasm. The militiamen of Massachusetts knew their strength, and, more important, they knew they had the ability to use that strength effectively.

Unfortunately, this lesson was lost even before it was learned. In telling their version of the battle to the world, the political leaders of Massachusetts strove to give the impression that there was nothing in the least warlike or hostile in their stance before General Gage sent his men to Concord. They were keenly aware that they needed to use the blood shed on April 19th to win the support of other Americans—especially those living outside New England.

The Massachusetts version of the day denounced “barbarous murders committed on our innocent brethren” and accused the British troops of “driving into the streets women in child-bed, killing old men in their houses.” The Lexington men were described as “a small party of the inhabitants . . . some with and some without firearms.” At other times they were called “peaceable spectators.” In Concord Barrett’s column became “inhabitants . . . collected at the bridge.” At no point was there any mention of minutemen or militia. The Americans were simply “provincials, roused with zeal for the liberties of their country” who “assumed their native valor” and fought so well that “the loss on the part of the British troops far exceeded” that of the patriots.

As political propaganda, the report was a masterpiece. It aroused an enormous explosion of sympathy and resentment throughout America. Some 20,000 men from western Massachusetts and the other three New England colonies rushed to join the minutemen and militia who had pursued Lord Percy to Charlestown on April 19th. They began building fortifications and organizing themselves into an army which effectively blockaded the British inside Boston. “In the

course of two days," wrote one glum British officer, "from a plentiful town we were reduced to the disagreeable necessity of living on salt provisions."

In Virginia, the Pennsylvania backcountry, Maryland, and South Carolina, long-neglected militia began electing new officers and drilling regularly. That moderate man, George Washington, was among those now ready to fight. "Unhappily, it is to reflect," he wrote, "that a Brother's sword has been sheathed in a Brother's Brest, and that, the once happy and peaceful plains of America are either to be drenched with Blood or Inhabited by Slaves. Sad alternative! But can a virtuous man hesitate in his choice?" A Philadelphia woman, writing to a British officer in Boston, told him: "Nothing is heard now in our streets but the trumpet and the drum; and the universal cry is 'Americans, to arms!' "

But this same woman also revealed what this propaganda victory cost the Americans. Mockingly, she asked her British correspondent why "the regulars, vastly superior in numbers. were obliged to retreat with [such] rapidity?" By January 1, 1776, the facts about British and American numbers had become so obscured that the editor of the *Pennsylvania Packet* could look back on April 19th and boast: "two thousand veteran British soldiers were attacked and defeated by 300 peasants, and were saved from total destruction by running 40 miles in one day."

April 19th convinced America's political leaders that a rapid gathering of patriot militia could defeat the British army wherever and whenever it dared to invade the country. As a result, when the Continental Congress appointed George Washington commander-in-chief of the New England army which was besieging the British in Boston, it gave him only halfhearted support in his struggle to create a large regular army for the duration of the war. John Adams said that only "the meanest, idlest, most intemperate and worthwhile" men would sign such a contract. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania declared, "I should despair of our Cause if our country contained sixty thousand men abandoned enough to enlist for three years or more. . . ."

A year later, when a vastly reinforced British army of 25,000 men attacked the Americans in New York, Washington had only

10,000 regulars to oppose them. The rest of his 23,000 men were militia. When the Americans suffered a series of defeats from this British war machine, the militia got discouraged and went home by the thousands. In November of 1776, when the country was in extremis, some 4,000 Massachusetts militiamen, no doubt some of them the same men who had fought so valiantly on April 19th (or their cousins or brothers) went home, ignoring desperate pleas from Washington and other generals.

Why? Washington knew the answer. The minutemen were a brilliant improvisation which worked magnificently on April 19th. But they were not designed to win a long war. This took discipline, perseverance, organization, and strategy which only a regular army of trained soldiers could produce. The reluctance of Congress to learn this lesson was a major reason why the Revolution became an exhausting 7-year war which Americans came perilously close to losing.

Even while we struggle to understand the deeper meaning, the forgotten realities of April 19th, we can still respond to the courage and fierce love of country that the minutemen and militia displayed on that historic day. Sixty-seven years later, one of the survivors of the Concord fight summed up the central idea behind their courage in words that still have meaning for contemporary Americans. "What we meant in going for those redcoats was this: we always had governed ourselves and we always meant to." The angry men of Massachusetts did more than make the first stroke of what became a war for independence decisive. They created an image of free men which has molded the character of a nation.

For Further Reading For those who wish to explore the story of Lexington and Concord in greater depth, the following books are recommended. *The Day of Concord and Lexington* by Allen French (Boston, 1925) is a careful examination of the myths and facts by a scrupulous historian. Equally valuable is another book by the same author, *General Gage's Informers* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1932), based on new material drawn from the papers of Gen. Thomas Gage in the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan. In this book French uses hitherto unknown British accounts, mostly officers' reports to Gage, to expand our knowledge and clarify many points. Still valuable, particularly for its vivid anecdotes in the appendix and elsewhere, is Richard Frothingham's *History of the Siege of Boston and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill* (Charlestown, Mass., 1872). A book aimed almost entirely at dispelling pro-American myths about the battle is Harold Murdock's *The Nineteenth of April, 1775* (Boston, 1925). *William Diamond's Drum* by Arthur B. Tourtellot (New York, 1959) is the most complete and sophisticated account of the political background of the battle. With literary skill of a high order, he draws vivid portraits of the major characters in the drama, and gives an excellent in-depth picture of the towns of Lexington and Concord. *The Minute Men* by Maj. John R. Galvin, USA (New York, 1967) is equally valuable for its minutely detailed study of the military side of the battle. *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* by Stephen E. Patterson (Madison, Wis., 1973) has a number of new insights into the struggle for a united front in the provincial congress. For a thorough look at the act of violence that led to Lexington and Concord, the best book is *The Boston Tea Party* by Benjamin W. Labaree (New York, 1964). Merrill Jensen's *The Founding of A Nation: A History of the Revolution 1763-1776* (New York, 1968) offers a valuable perspective on the emerging revolution in other colonies, as well as in Massachusetts. Some biographical studies also shed considerable light on the events of April 19th. Among these are: John R. Alden's *General Gage in America* (Baton Rouge, La., 1948), John C. Miller's *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda* (New York, 1936), and John Cary's *Joseph Warren: Physician, Politician and Patriot* (Urbana, Ill., 1961). For a look at the loyalist side of the quarrel in Massachusetts, there is *The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson* by Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Fleming Thomas J

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Bibliography p

Supt of Docs I29 2 R32/3

1 Lexington Battle of 1775 2 Concord Battle
of 1775 I Title

E241 L6F55 973 3 311 76 608319

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